THE CARLETON CASE

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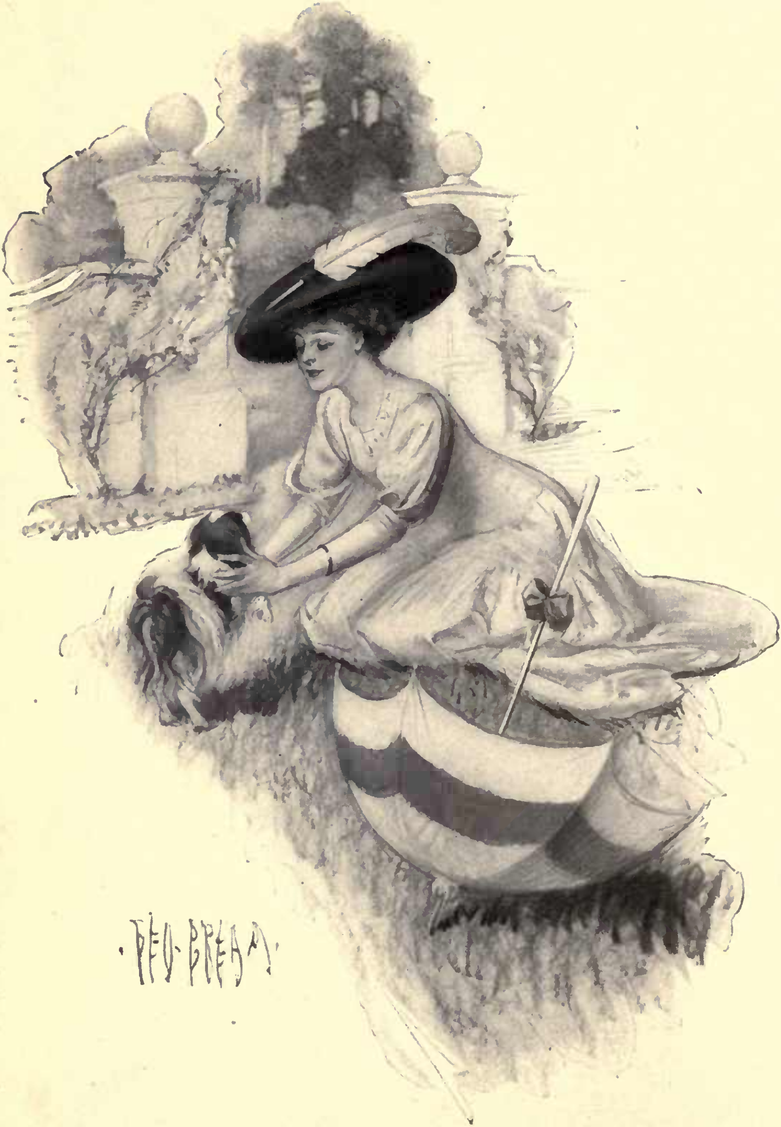
THE CARLETON CASE



"The girl who knelt upon the grass."—Page 29

The Carleton Case

By ELLERY H. CLARK

Author of "Loaded Dice," Etc.

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To My Friends

MR. AND MRS. H. DENTON WHITE

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THE CARLETON CASE

CHAPTER I

DOCTOR HELMAR VISITS THE BIRCHES

> "Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright."
> *Psalm xxxvii.*

IN Doctor Morrison's breakfast-room the curtains were drawn back, and the windows stood wide open, letting in a flood of warm June sunshine, and filling the whole room with the fragrance of the soft June air. Even into the streets of the city, restricted and shut in, something of the freshness and beauty of the summer morning had managed to make their way, and to Franz Helmar, seated alone at the breakfast table, listening to the chatter of the sparrows and the cooing of the pigeons on the roofs outside, there came suddenly a sense of irritation at the monotony of dingy sidewalk and dusty street, of house after house of brick varied only by house after house of stone.

Irresistibly, there crept over him the whimsical fancy that he would like to see the whole vast city at one stroke fade and vanish completely before his eyes, and in its place behold once more hill and valley, river and plain; all the wide and boundless freedom of the country; the splendid, sunlit glory of out-of-doors.

Suddenly, across the current of his musing, there sounded once again the sharp, insistent ringing of the telephone, scattering all his day-dreams into flight, and for the moment he paused, his coffee-cup suspended in mid air, the better to listen to the doctor's voice in the hall outside.

"Yes, this is Doctor Morrison," he heard in the doctor's sharp, alert, yet not unpleasant tones, his "professional" voice, and then, pitched in a lower key, far more intimate and cordial, he heard at broken intervals, "Ah, yes, good morning — I'm sorry to hear that — No, I'm afraid I can't myself; not this morning, anyway — No, but I can send my colleague, Doctor Helmar — Oh, perfectly, no doubt of that; this is the day of young men, you know — All right — Eight-fifteen, South — All right; good-by," and then the click of the receiver, and the doctor himself reëntered the room.

Doctor Morrison was a slender, wiry, middle-aged little man, with a quick, nervous manner, and a face pleasantly keen and inquisitive, clean-shaven, save for a little sandy mustache, and with hair — what was left of it — of the same color. Professionally, he ranked among the first half-dozen practitioners in the city. He was an autocrat in demanding obedience from his patients, and a very martinet in insisting that his rules should be obeyed, while he himself, in private life, with the most delightful inconsistency, contrived successfully to break them all. Cocktails he absolutely forbade — and drank them with infinite relish. Tobacco he denounced as one of the curses of modern life — and peacefully smoked cigarettes innumerable. Eight hours sleep he declared to be a necessity — and himself sat up until all hours of the night and morning. In him you met a doctor stern and aweinspiring — terrifying, even — until you came to know him, and then, shorn of his "professional" voice and manner, you came suddenly upon a man, gentle-hearted, humane and kind.

Seating himself, he glanced up at Helmar, talking jerkily over his eggs and toast, in his absence now grown somewhat discouraged looking and cold.

"A job for you, Franz," he said, "Edward Carleton — the man who owns that big place out at Eversley — Oaks? Beeches? What is the name? Some kind of tree. Birches. That's it. Birches. Funny name to give a place, anyway. Well, the old man's laid up with a cold. That was his brother who telephoned. Henry Carleton, you know, the bank man. He wanted me to come out at once, and I told him I couldn't, but that I'd send you instead. — Train leaves South Station at eight-fifteen. So you've plenty of time. I'll look after Colonel Wentworth myself, and drop in to see Mrs. Brooks. Nothing else, is there?"

Helmar shook his head. "No, that's all," he answered, "and I'm mighty glad to trade. For one thing, I was just thinking how the country would look to-day, and for another, I'd like to meet old Mr. Carleton. I knew Jack Carleton very well when we were in college — as well as I knew anyone, really. So I should enjoy meeting his father."

Doctor Morrison paused a moment. He was rather a well-advised man on social affairs. "*Jack* Carleton," he repeated, "some trouble there somewhere, isn't there? Isn't he the one who doesn't live at home?"

"Yes," Helmar assented, "he's the one. The trouble's all between him and Henry, I believe. Uncle and nephew — it's a queer combination for a family row. But I guess it's a case where the old gentleman's on the best of terms with both of them, and hardly feels like taking sides. And so, since Henry Carleton and Jack can't get along together, why, it's Henry that's rather got the inside track. He always did live at The Birches, you know, even before his wife died. And then there's his little girl — I understand that Edward Carleton is most devoted to her, and for the matter of that, that Jack is too. And she's awfully fond of him, and of the old gentleman. Likes them fully as much as she does her father, from what I hear. But it's Jack and his uncle that can't agree. Never could, I guess. Maybe Jack's a bit more jealous than he ought to be. Anyway, it was all right while he was in college — he wasn't home a great deal then — but after he graduated, I understand things began to get a little raw, so he quit and branched out for himself."

Doctor Morrison nodded. "Yes," he said, "I see. I thought I recalled something of the sort," and after a little pause, he added, "I suppose, as you intimate, it isn't very hard to guess where the trouble lies, either. I'm afraid, Helmar, there's something rather rattle-brained about your friend. An attractive looking fellow enough, though, as I remember him, but I'm afraid without much of his uncle's ability, or, for that matter, of his character, either."

Helmar looked thoughtful. "Well," he began doubtfully, "I don't really know. But somehow I think —"

Doctor Morrison cut him short. After the fashion of many clever men, he was possessed of an idea, and was going to deliver himself of it. Until he had done so, the privilege of the floor was his, and his alone. "I look upon Henry Carleton," he continued, a little sententiously, "as one of our coming men. Some day he is sure to be regarded as one of the really solid men of the city; practically, I suppose he is that now. They tell me that he's exceedingly able, and that he's amassed a great deal of money of his own; and then they say he has all his brother's fortune behind him, too. The old gentleman made his money away back in the days of the clipper ships, and the Chinese trade. One of the old time merchants, Edward Carleton was, shrewd and thrifty and far-seeing, and I guess Henry is all that his brother ever was, and more besides. And then he's interested in so many other things. You know what a thorough musician he is, and what a lot he does to help the younger singers along. And confound it all, the man's literary, too. Writes, you know, and presides at anniversaries and dedications and all that sort of thing. Oh, he's one of our leading men, Helmar. Able, and public-spirited, and upright. I wish we had a hundred more like him."

Helmar had listened patiently, but the thoughtful expression had not left his face. "Yes," he assented at last, though scarcely with enthusiasm. "Yes, I suppose so. Certainly I never knew anybody more generally looked up to than Henry Carleton seems to be. And yet — it's queer about him and Jack, because Jack's a good fellow, too. In a different way, perhaps. I suppose he does lack balance; but there's something awfully human and likeable about him, just the same. But I'm prejudiced in his favor, I'll admit; I used to know him so well."

He rose as he spoke, and started to leave the room; then paused a moment on the threshold, throwing a backward glance over his shoulder.

"Come on, Rex," he called, and at the sound of his voice there came slowly from beneath the breakfast table a little brown and white spaniel, who first stopped leisurely to stretch himself, next shook his slender body mightily as if to get himself thoroughly awake, and finally trotted briskly away at Helmar's heels. Then, outside in the hall, as he saw his master reach for his hat and bag, he became suddenly greatly excited, springing to and fro with quick, nervous bounds, his mouth open, his little red tongue hanging out, his brown eyes glowing, finally standing straight up on his hind legs, and waving his fore paws frantically, as in supplication. Helmar, observing him, held up a warning finger, and instantly the dog again subsided, sitting quietly down on his haunches, his head cocked inquiringly to one side, his brown eyes, now grown a trifle anxious, fixed on his master's face, uncertain of his fate. Helmar looked gravely down at him, a twinkle in his eye, but speaking with assumed regret. "No," he said slowly, "no, I guess not, sir. It's a long ways for a little dog, and he might not behave himself, either. He might bark — he might run away — he might chase squirrels, even — he might be a bad, bad dog." Now the little dog's big, soft eyes looked very sorrowful, as if they were not far from tears; the head and ears drooped pathetically, the tail limp, discouraged and lifeless, every line of his body expressing the idea that for little dogs it was a very hard, a very sad, a very unkind world. Then suddenly he raised his head. Surely, even as he had despaired, a change had come; surely the admonishing finger was being lowered, and his master's voice was speaking to him in the tones he loved best to hear. "*But,*" Helmar was slowly emphasizing, "seeing that on the whole you're a pretty good little dog, perhaps if you'll give me your word — your solemn word — to behave, and be a gentleman, why, I think —" his voice quickened perceptibly to a more encouraging tone —"I think, sir, I might let you go. Do you want to go, sir? Do you want to go?"

There was no mistaking the little dog's answer. With one bound he hurled himself headlong like a miniature catapult against the solid oak of the door, then stood motionless, quivering with excitement, his tail waving jauntily, like a plume, over his back, giving vent to short, sharp barks of joyful impatience. It was a great world for little dogs, after all; a world of blue sky and long, waving grass, a world of running brooks and sunshine, a world perhaps of squirrels even. Helmar, regarding him, laughed. "Come on, then," he cried, and in a moment the door had closed behind them.

The town clock was striking nine as Helmar got off the train at Eversley, walked up the station lane, and turned into the narrow footpath leading straight across the half mile of broad green meadow that lay between the station and The Birches. Rapidly and steadily his tall figure strode along, from time to time with a half smile on his dark, clean-shaven face, as he watched the little spaniel tearing on far ahead of him, in a very frenzy of delighted freedom, racing and circling desperately here and there in vain pursuit of butterfly and bird.

To the farther edge of the meadow they came. There Helmar, clearing the low rail fence at a bound, for a moment hesitated as he sought to recall Doctor Morrison's directions, then turned sharp to the right along the shady country road; proceeding at first uncertainly, as on a journey into unknown country, then more confidently, as one by one he came on the landmarks the doctor had foretold:

first the massive wall of stone and concrete that marked the limits of the Carleton boundaries, then grove after grove of the silver birches that had gained the place its name, and finally, almost before he expected it, a break in the high lilac hedge, a long, winding drive, green lawns shaded by towering elms, gardens fragrant with flowers, and in the background, just pleasantly distant from the road, the huge, rambling, many-chimneyed old house itself — Edward Carleton's home.

CHAPTER II

INQUIRING FRIENDS

"Distance sometimes endears friendship, and absence sweeteneth it." *Howell.*

HELMAR had covered perhaps half the distance to the house, when ahead of him he caught sight of a little girl, sitting cross-legged under the shade of one of the big elms, her head bent low over the buttercup wreath she was weaving, and at her side a young woman — from her dress, evidently the child's nurse or companion — sitting with her back against the tree, deep buried in her book. At the sound of Helmar's footsteps the child glanced up quickly, and catching sight of the spaniel advancing manfully with head in air, and tail wagging in friendliest of greetings, she scrambled to her feet, and tossing her half-finished wreath aside, came flying across the lawn to meet him. Evidently with both it was a case of love at first sight, for the child stooped and picked the dog up bodily in her arms, pressing his face to hers, and calling him by the hundred pet names which spring so readily to the lips of any true woman — whatever her age. "Oh, you dear," she cried softly, "you darling; aren't you a pretty dog!" while the spaniel lay quietly in her arms, only striving to lick her face with his little red tongue. Then, as Helmar approached, she looked up. "Isn't he a beauty!" she said. "Does he belong to you?"

Helmar stood smiling down at her, thinking that unconsciously she made a very pretty picture with the spaniel's head pressed against her cheek. She was a dainty little fairy, slender and graceful, dressed in an airy frock of white muslin, with a broad sash of blue ribbon, her straw hat dangling neglected down her back, her big, serious dark eyes gazing solemnly up into his. He nodded in answer. "Yes, he belongs to me," he said, "but do you suppose you could look after him while I go in to see your uncle?"

The little girl nodded in eager assent. "Oh, yes, indeed," she cried. "I'll take care of him. I'll give him my buttercup wreath. Come now, you darling, come with me," and with the spaniel still in her arms, she walked back toward the shelter of the big elm.

At Helmar's nearer approach, the child's nurse, too, had risen, laying aside her book, and as he passed, naturally enough their glances met — for an instant only — and then Helmar again strode along upon his way, carrying with him the impression of a charming face, and a most alluring smile.

What was there, he wondered, about the girl, that was so vaguely disquieting? She was dressed quietly enough in simple black, with a little snugly-fitting white apron, reaching, by mere chance, just to the height of her bosom, and held in place by smart little shoulder-straps, about it all a daintily vague impression of ribbon and lace. Her figure, indeed, was perfect; deliciously rounded; and the closely-fitting dress seemed to bring out, with significant emphasis, all the beauty of her form. Her face, moreover, was more striking still; her pretty blonde hair appeared to curl so naturally as utterly to defy the mode of convention; her big blue eyes drooped modestly as soon as she had become conscious of his gaze, just long enough to show the heavy fringed eyelashes above, and then almost as quickly glanced up again; there had been a flush of rose in her cheeks, and a deeper scarlet on the lips that had smiled at him. Perhaps it was in the smile itself — slow, langourous, inviting — that the whole woman had seemed suddenly to lie revealed; and scarcely able as yet to define it, Helmar felt that the girl's seeming simplicity was the dangerous charm of the highest art, and that he had gazed on the guile of the serpent, and not on the innocence of the dove.

Puzzling a little as he walked along, he cast back in his mind to chance words that from time to time had fallen haphazard from Jack Carleton's lips, and finally, in one sudden flash of memory, he came upon the clue. "Jeanne," he said to himself, half aloud, "of course; that's who it is; Jeanne." Then, falling back unconsciously into the slang of college days, he added, "and she *is* a peach, too; Jack told the truth for once; no wonder he had his little affair." And finally, as he mounted the steps of the broad piazza, he spoke again. "But pretty risky fun," he muttered, "playing with fire, all right; there are some women in the world that a man wants to steer clear of, and I should put that girl down for one of them."

He rang the bell, and almost immediately there appeared in answer a butler, thin, pale, and of uncertain age, but even to Helmar's unpractised eye superlatively autocratic, hopelessly correct. He seemed, indeed, to be not so much a human being as the living embodiment of all known rules of social etiquette, condensed, as it were, into the final perfect expression of a type, before whom and whose vast store of knowledge one could only bow, humbly praying that the mistakes of honest ignorance might graciously be forgiven. Helmar, following in his wake, felt properly sensible of the honor done him, as he was ushered up the broad, winding staircase to the entrance of the big square room at the front of the house, where his guide stopped, and most decorously knocked. In answer a great voice called lustily, "Come in!" and the butler promptly stepped to one side. " Mr. Carleton, sir," he observed, "left orders that you were to be admitted at once," and thereupon, opening the door, he stood respectfully back, and as Helmar entered, closed it softly behind him.

Edward Carleton, attired in an old-fashioned quilted dressing-gown, was sitting up, reading, in his huge, high, square bed, his back propped with pillows innumerable. Well upward of seventy, he looked strong and active still; gaunt, with a wrinkled, weather-beaten face, a great bushy square-cut gray beard, and fiercely tufted eyebrows, while in the eyes beneath them, as he slowly took off his horn-rimmed spectacles and glanced up at his visitor, Helmar caught an expression of lurking, humorous kindliness that put him at once in mind of Jack Carleton himself.

As Helmar advanced, the old man reached out a gnarled and sinewy hand. " Good morning, sir," he said pleasantly, " I take it that you're Doctor Morrison's young man."

Helmar, as he took the proffered hand, smiled to himself at the old-fashioned quaintness of the phrase. "Yes, sir," he answered, "that's my professional title. In private life I'm Franz Helmar, and in either capacity very much at your service."

Edward Carleton nodded. "Thank you," he answered courteously, and then, more abruptly, "you think you've come out here to see a sick man, Doctor, but you haven't. Just a bit of a chill — I managed to let myself get caught in that shower yesterday afternoon — and maybe a little fever with it. But I'm not sick. It's all Henry's nonsense. Just because he's twenty years younger than I am, he has to look after me as if I were a baby."

He spoke with assumed indignation, yet Helmar could detect in his tone a note of satisfaction at being so well cared for; and when he answered him, he aimed to fall in with the old man's mood.

"Why, I think myself that I'm out here under false pretenses," he said good-humoredly, "you don't look at all like an invalid to me; but still the ounce of prevention, you know, it never does any harm. So many things nowadays start with a cold. It's just as well to step right in and stop them before they get a hold on us. Now, then, we'll see where we are, at any rate," and as he spoke, he deftly slipped the little temperature tube under Edward Carleton's tongue, and closed his fingers lightly on the lean brown wrist. A minute or two passed in silence, the old man's eyes fixed on Helmar's face with the scrutinizing interest of the patient who awaits the professional verdict. Then Helmar withdrew the tube, studied it an instant, nodded as if satisfied, asked a few questions, and then hastened to give his opinion.

"Oh, well," he said reassuringly, "this is all right. We'll fix you up, Mr. Carleton. Just a little tonic, and a few days' rest, and you'll be as good as new; better than new, really, because a day or two off is a benefit to anybody, at any time. You'd better stay in bed, though, to-day, I think; and personally I rather envy you. I see you have good company."

He pointed as he spoke, to the three stout little volumes that lay by Mr. Carleton's side. *Roderick Random* was the first; *Tom Jones,* the second; *Tristram Shandy,* the third. Their owner nodded in pleased assent.

"Yes, indeed," he answered, "they'll last me through the day, all right. I never get tired of them, Doctor. I was just reading, when you came in, how Tom Bowling came to see the old curmudgeon who was about to die. 'So, old gentleman,' he says, 'you're bound for the other shore, I see, but in my opinion most damnably ill-provided for the voyage'; and later on, after the old fellow's dead, he tells some one, that asks after him, that they might look for him 'somewhere about the latitude of hell.' There's good, sound, human nature for you. Smollett knew his sailors, and the rest of his world, too, and enjoyed them both, I imagine. And he wasn't a hypocrite; that's what I like most about him. He saw things as they were."

Helmar smiled. "I agree with you," he answered, "but the modern school of readers doesn't care for him, just the same. He's either too simple for them, or too coarse; I don't know which."

Edward Carleton looked his scorn. "Modern school!" he ejaculated. "Let me tell you, sir, I have but very little opinion of your modern school, writers or readers either. But Henry stands up for 'em, and brings 'em all to me to read. Good Lord above, the different kinds! There's some that tell you whether John Smith had one egg for breakfast, or two, and whether either of 'em was bad, and if it was, what John Smith said to his wife, and what she said to him — and Henry claims those books are modern classics. Then he's got another lot — romantic school, I believe they are — all dashing cavaliers and lovely ladies and flashing swords and general moonshine — stuff about fit for idiots and invalids; and last of all —" he glared at Helmar as if he were the unfortunate embodiment of all the literary sins of the day — "he's got a crowd — Heaven knows what *he* calls 'em; the pig-sty school's *my* name — that seem to be having a regular game; trying to see which can write the dirtiest book, and yet have it stop just enough short of the line so they can manage to get it published without the danger of having it suppressed. And the mean, hypocritical excuses they make — they're always teaching a moral lesson, you know, or something like that. It makes me sick, sir; it makes me sick; and I don't hesitate to tell Henry so, either."

Helmar nodded assentingly, and yet, with a twinkle in his eye, he could not resist the temptation to reach forward and pick up from the bed the volume of Sterne. "I agree with a great deal of what you say, sir," he answered, "especially the latter part, and yet — it isn't wholly a modern vice. There was old Rabelais, for instance, and his imitators, and even *Tristram* here I suppose you could hardly recommend for a Sunday-school."

Edward Carleton was no casuist. He loved to fight, but he always fought fair. "I grant it," he answered quickly; "Laurence Sterne did have a little sneaking peep-hole way with him at times — he was modern there — but you can forgive a great deal to the man who gave us Uncle Toby and Corporal Trim. And then, he isn't a fair example; he was a kind of literary exception to all rules; but take Smollett or Henry Fielding. They struck straight out from the shoulder, every time. What they meant, they said. They painted vice, I grant you, but they painted her naked and repulsive, as she should be, and that's fair enough; you can go back to your Aristotle for that, Doctor. But they didn't disguise her, sir; they didn't call her something that she never was and never could be; and these modern swine, they dress out vice in silks and satins, and make you believe she's the most beautiful thing in the world — so beautiful that no man can be happy unless he may possess her; and there's no Henry Fielding to come along with his big, scornful laugh, and strip her of all her frippery and finery, and show you the stark, naked sin that lies there underneath it all. Oh, I'm right, Doctor, and I'm always telling Henry so, but I can't convince him. He says it's art, whatever that means, and he's all for the modern school."

Helmar rose, smiling. "You *are* right, I believe," he said heartily, "and if we all read more of the old worthies, and less of this flood of modern trash, we'd do better, beyond a doubt. Well, I must get my train, I suppose. I'm going to leave the medicine with your butler; I'll give him full directions; and you'll be all right, without any question. If you should want anything, telephone Doctor Morrison or me at once. I'm very glad to have had the chance of meeting you, sir. Oh, and there was one other thing I meant to tell you: I knew your son Jack very well in college. We used to be the best of friends."

Edward Carleton looked up quickly, but without speaking, and when at last he did so, there was a new note of cordiality in his tone. "You knew Jack," he repeated, "why, I'm glad to hear that, I'm sure. I'm very fond of my boy, Doctor. Boy? He's a man now, though I can never seem to realize it. He's only a little boy to me still, for all his six feet and his forty inches around the chest. Do you ever see him nowadays, Doctor?"

Helmar nodded. "Yes, indeed," he answered readily, "not very often, of course. We're in different lines of work, and both busy, I guess. But I run across him every once in a while. And this week we're going to dine together. Jack and I and another fellow who was in our class — a sort of small reunion, to celebrate being five years out of college. He'll be interested to know I've been out here."

The old man nodded, gazing straight before him. "Doctor," he asked suddenly, with apparent irrelevance, "you took my pulse to-day. What did you think of my heart?"

Helmar, surprised, parried with the clumsiness of a man not fond of deception. "Why," he evaded, "I wouldn't worry about that. All you have is a cold. You've got a pretty good heart, I think. We none of us grow any younger, though. That's sure."

Edward Carleton smiled a little grimly. "Thanks," he said, "sometimes a patient knows more about himself than a doctor thinks he does. And I suppose I could guess pretty well what certain things mean. Never mind, though. As you say, we don't grow any younger, more's the pity."

Both were silent, Helmar pausing a moment, uncertainly, with one hand on the knob of the door. Then the old man glanced up at him, with a smile genial and friendly, if a trifle wistful. "Good-by, Doctor," he said courteously, "thank you for your interest. And tell Jack he's always welcome, whenever he finds time to run out. The Birches is always his home, and his room stands ready for him — always."

Five minutes later Helmar again passed down the broad steps of the piazza into the cheerful, dazzling sunlight. The little girl and her nurse were still seated under the shade of the big elm, and at once the spaniel, breaking away from his new friends, came tearing across the lawn to his master, ruthlessly scattering buttercups at every bound. With a laugh Helmar picked him up in his arms, and took him back to make his proper farewells. For the little girl the final moment of parting was a hard one, and she gazed longingly at her playmate, as though unwilling to have him go. Her nurse, observing her, shook her head in reproof. "Don't be so foolish, Miss Rose," she chided, "he's only a little dog; you mustn't be silly;" then, suddenly, she looked squarely at Helmar. "Will you excuse me, please," she said softly, "but I know that you're a friend of Mr. Jack's. Would you tell me where a letter would reach him?"

Helmar eyed her keenly, and before his gaze the blue eyes dropped, and this time were not raised again. A faint flush stole into her cheeks. Helmar, in his turn, looked away. "Yes," he answered shortly, "Mayflower Club, City, is his present address."

He had his reward. At once the girl's eyes were raised again, and her look sought his with the same smile that he had seen before. It was not a smile of the lips alone, but of the eyes as well, and a certain nameless something that flashed from still deeper within, a piquant frankness, a dangerous friendliness. Again he started to turn away, then stopped; his eyes, though half against his will, still seeking hers.

On the silence broke in the voice of the little girl. "Is it Cousin Jack?" she demanded, "do you know Cousin Jack?" And as Helmar nodded, she cried, "I wish you'd tell him to come out and see me. He hasn't been here for an awfully long time. Will you tell him, please?"

Helmar promised, and with a glance at his watch, took a hasty leave. Thoughtfully enough he made his way back to the station, and yet, before he reached it, one meeting more was destined to give him food for further meditation. Nearing the entrance to the station lane, the vigorous and friendly bark of his faithful body-guard struck suddenly on his ear, and turning the corner, he paused in quick surprise at the sight of the girl who knelt upon the grass, parasol, hat and gloves tossed carelessly aside, holding the spaniel's head imprisoned caressingly between her dainty hands, and talking to him with mock severity the while. As she glanced up, perceiving Helmar, she somewhat hastily arose, and as he approached, smilingly extended her hand in greeting.

Very attractive, indeed, she looked. Fashionably dressed, yet simply, as well; young — she could scarcely have been over twenty, at the most — and with a face that one could hardly choose but like at once — the clear-cut, regular features, the honest, straightforward brown eyes, the pretty color in the dimpled cheeks, the firm little chin, the laughing, yet sensitive mouth. One liked too the erectness of her slender figure, and the well-poised head, crowned with its masses of soft brown hair. If one had been ungracious enough to venture a criticism, the thought might have come that she shared, perhaps, the fault of so many American girls of the well-to-do class, the excusable habit of taking the good things of life too much as a matter of course, of being too easily satisfied with the doings and standards of their own particular class and "set," of having no real knowledge, and worse still, perhaps, of desiring none, of the great world at large. Yet even if the criticism had been hazarded, the critic must still have been forced to admit that plenty of character showed in the girl's face, and while of her mere good looks alone there could be no question, in seeming paradox, the more one looked at her the more one forgot her mere prettiness, granting it carelessly enough as something secondary, so much more uncommon and striking were the other qualities written there — strength and sympathy and above all, that holy and beautiful thing before which any man may well stand in reverent admiration — the innate goodness of the true woman, pure in thought and deed.

As he took her hand, Helmar's face showed his surprise. "Well, Marjory Graham," he cried, "who'd have thought of seeing you?"

Laughingly the girl mimicked him. "Why, Franz Helmar," she said in turn, "you're not the one to be surprised. You knew I lived in Eversley. But what are *you* doing out here?"

"Old Mr. Carleton," he answered, "he's a little under the weather. I ran out to see how he was getting along."

The girl's face clouded. "Oh, I'm sorry," she said, "he's such a dear old man. And he's my father's greatest friend, you know. I hope it's nothing serious."

Helmar shook his head. "No, I think not," he answered, "he'll be all right — for this time. And he is a first-class old chap, too. Do you know, I think Jack is awfully like him, in many ways?"

At the words a sudden change came over the girl's expressive face. For a moment she hesitated, then raised her eyes to his. "Franz," she said, "how often do you see Jack now?"

Helmar glanced at her quizzically. "Oh," he answered, " every once in a while. Not so often as you do, though, I guess."

He spoke jestingly, but the girl gave him no answering smile, and he hastened to add, " Why, I expect to see him Wednesday night, Marjory, to make arrangements for a little dinner we're going to have Thursday — Jack and Arthur Vaughan and I. Is there anything I can do? "

The girl colored faintly. " It's only this," she said, " and I ought to write to him and not bother you. But when you see Jack, would you mind telling him that I shall be at home Friday evening, if he cares to come out? "

Seemingly, there was more in the words than appeared on the surface, but Helmar, with a certain instinctive chivalry, chose to treat the request with apparent lightness. " Of course I'll tell him," he answered, " with all the pleasure in life."

She looked her gratitude. " Thank you very much, Franz," she said, " and you will remember, won't you? "

He nodded reassuringly. " I surely will," he answered, and as he spoke, the train burst shrieking, around the near-by curve. "Oh, don't miss it!" she cried. "Thank you, Franz; thank you so much; good-by."

Breaking into a swift run, Helmar, with the spaniel racing excitedly at his heels, reached the station platform just in time. Boarding the train, and taking a seat far forward in the almost deserted car, he sat for some time in thoughtful silence, and then at last voiced his reflections to the one friend who never betrayed his confidence. "Rex, my boy," he said slowly, "our friend Jack seems to have achieved the secret of universal popularity."

The spaniel, listening with head cocked knowingly to one side, gave a sharp, quick bark in reply, and Helmar laughed. "Does that mean you think so, or you don't think so?" he asked, but the little dog refused further to commit himself, and curling up in his master's lap, went promptly and comfortably to sleep.

CHAPTER III

THE PRODIGAL SON

"The pains and penalties of idleness."

Pope.

IT was after eight o'clock, yet still faintly light out-of-doors, as Jack Carleton left his rooms at the Mayflower Club, and came slowly down the winding staircase, with one hand groping for the railing, as if uncertain of his way.

At first sight he looked extremely well, and in his fashionably-cut street suit of light gray, his tall and well-built figure showed to excellent advantage, though in the five years which had passed since his graduation he had seemingly grown heavier and stouter, and somehow distinctly softer looking, as if the active exercise of former days had come now to be the exception, and not the rule. And this impression, as he paused midway on the stairs to light a cigarette, was still further borne out by the appearance of his face. He was handsome enough still, and his complexion, indeed, from a distance, in contrast with his fair hair and closely-clipped mustache, seemed the perfection of ruddy health; yet the tell-tale spurt of the match, as he held it to his lips, told a far different story. His color, naturally high, was beginning now to be patched with red and white, giving his face a significantly mottled look, and if any further hint had been needed, it was furnished by his eyes, which stared straight ahead of him with a curiously glassy expression. Plainly enough, Jack Carleton was drunk.

Still holding fast to the rail, he accomplished the remainder of his journey in safety; then started a little unsteadily toward the door of the lounging room, stopping short at the entrance, and staring vacantly in at the half dozen figures looming mistily through the haze of smoke. Instantly he was hailed by two or three at once. "Hullo, Jack, what'll you have?" "Come on in, Jack." "Make a fourth at bridge, Jack?" Carleton, standing motionless, with one hand fumbling in his pocket for a match with which to relight his cigarette, still gazed aimlessly and apparently without recognition into the room. "Make a fourth at bridge, Jack?" some one called again sharply, and Carleton, starting, jerkily, but with intense gravity, shook his head. "No, not t'night," he said slowly, as if settling some matter of immense moment to all concerned, "can't play t'night; very shorry; got date." He stood a moment longer; then, half mechanically, as it seemed, turned and slowly walked toward the outer door that led into the street.

With a little exclamation, one of the loungers hastily rose, and followed him out into the hall. Jim Turner was a stock broker, and a most successful one. He was a man of middle age, short, stout, and unattractive looking. He had a round, fat face, pale reddish hair and mustache, small, nondescript, expressionless eyes, a pasty complexion, and white, pudgy hands, which he took pains to have manicured regularly three times a week. He was entirely unimaginative, practical, commonplace — and very successful. He had one favorite motto; "Look at things as they are, and not as you'd like 'em to be."

He quickly overtook Carleton — a feat, indeed, not difficult of accomplishment — and laid a detaining hand on his shoulder. "See here, Jack," he said in a low tone, "I want you to let me sell out some of your things. We get advices that there's trouble coming — and pretty quickly, too. And by this time you're really carrying quite a big line. So I guess it wouldn't do any harm if you began gradually to unload a little. Don't you think so yourself, Jack?"

Carleton gazed at him from eyes in which there was no understanding. He shook his head slightly. "Don' want t'sell," he said at last, "ain't I 'way 'head th' game?"

"Oh, sure," Turner assented. "You're ahead of the game, all right, but I want to have you stay there. And when things start to go in a top-heavy market, why — they go almighty quick. That's all. There's your Suburban Electric, now. That's had a big rise. Let me sell five hundred of that, anyway. You've got a good profit. And you'll find you can get out and in again, too. You won't have any trouble doing that."

Again Carleton obstinately shook his head. "No," he said, with an almost childish delight in contradiction, "I don' get 'ny 'dvices like that. I get 'dvices S'burban 'Lectric's going to hundred'n fifty. I don' want t'sell now. Not such fool."

Turner, seeing the futility of further argument, shrugged his shoulders impassively. "Well, drop in at the office and see me to-morrow, anyway, Jack," he said.

Carleton nodded. "Sure," he answered cheerfully, "I'll be in. Got t'get 'long now," and he made again for the door.

Turner slowly made his way back into the lounging room. One of the smokers looked up at him with a laugh. "Old Jack's pretty full, isn't he?" he said, "growing on him, I should say."

A second lounger caught up the remark. "Full," he echoed, "oh, no, not for him. He's sober as a church now. When he can walk, and see where he's going, he's all right. You ought to see him around the Club here some nights. Talk about raising hell!"

The first man yawned. "Well," he said slowly, "it's like lots of other things. It's all right and good fun for once in a way, but for a steady thing — why, Heaven help the poor devil that gets going it and can't stop. There isn't any humor in it then. Nothing jovial, or convivial, or anything else. It's just simply damnable; that's what it is. And Jack Carleton's too good a fellow to go that way. It's a shame."

The second man nodded in answer. "That's right enough," he assented, "and it's rough on his old man, too. He's an awfully good sort, the old chap. And Jack could amount to something, if he wanted to. That's the bad part. He was never cut out for a soak."

"Doesn't he do anything at all?" some one asked.

The first man shook his head. "Not a thing," he answered. "The old man gives him an allowance, I understand, or else he inherited something from his mother; I don't really know which. And Jack's playing Alcohol to win, I guess, and Suburban Electric for place." He grinned at his own joke.

The second man turned suddenly to Turner. "Say, Jim, you know everything," he said; "what about this uncle of Jack's — this Henry Carleton? I seem to hear a lot about him lately. He's the whole shooting-match down-town. What sort of man is he, anyway?"

Turner launched a little family of smoke rings into the air, and watched them float upward before he replied. "Oh, I don't know," he answered indifferently, "he's smart as the devil, for one thing. I know that for a fact."

"Yes, that's right," the first man chimed in, "everybody says that. And yet, you know, it's funny, but there's always something that strikes me as disagreeable about that man's looks. He seems so confoundedly self-assertive, and sure of himself, somehow."

Turner rose to take his departure. "Oh, I don't know," he said again. "First we sit here and damn a man for being a sport, and then we turn around and damn another man because he's smart, and we don't like his face. It's mighty easy to criticize." He paused a moment, then added, with what for him was almost an excess of feeling, "I'm really sorry about Jack, though. It's too bad."

Meantime, once out in the street, the air seemed for the moment to steady Carleton, and he started off briskly enough for the South Station. As he walked along, he pulled a letter from his pocket, read it through carefully, and then, as though striving to recall something that had escaped him, proceeded on his way with a puzzled and dissatisfied expression on his face. "Friday, Friday," he muttered to himself, "something else, but can't seem to think what. Guess nothing important. Anyway, can't think."

In due time he reached the station, and took his stand opposite the gateway through which the passengers from the incoming Eversley train would pass. There he stood, from time to time absent-mindedly consulting his watch, until at length from a distant rumble and cloud of smoke emerged the big engine, with flashing headlight and clanging bell, and huge wheels revolving more and more slowly until at length, with one last jerk, the whole train came suddenly to a stand. Then under the arc-light bustled forth the figures of the incoming passengers — first one, then another, then twos and threes, lines, groups — all hurrying, intent and eager, bound for their destination, and restlessly anxious to get there at once, wasting as little time as possible in transit. Scrutinizing them with care, it was not until the very end of the procession was reached that Carleton started suddenly forward. At the same instant the girl discovered him, and came quickly toward him.

Carleton's masculine eye could hardly have appreciated all the details of her dress, yet the general effect was certainly not lost on him. Knowledge of the name of the dainty gown of blue and white would probably have conveyed no impression to his mind, but the way in which it fitted and the significant emphasis it lent to the graceful lines of the girl's figure were matters which he viewed with no unappreciative eye. Surveying her critically as she advanced, from head to foot, from the hat of simple straw, with its clusters of blue flowers, to the tip of the dainty slipper, with just a glimpse of silken stocking above, he nodded in gracious approval. The girl was certainly looking her best, her pretty hair curling about her forehead in little clustering rings, her face just delicately flushed with color, her blue eyes very coquettish and very sparkling. Doubtless, too, these same practised eyes lost nothing of Carleton's condition, for it was with a certain easy assurance that she came up to him and slipped her arm familiarly through his with a gentle welcoming pressure, glancing up almost impudently into his face. "Hullo, dear," she said, "and how's Jack?"

Carleton looked down at her, an odd mixture of emotions showing in his face; a certain satisfaction, a certain shame, above all, a certain recklessness — the recklessness of the aristocrat who, with a shrug of his shoulders, goes voluntarily out of his class, fascinated beyond his strength, half scornful of himself, and wholly regardless of what the consequences may be.

"Oh, fine, thanks," he answered absently, and then, as they emerged from the station into the street, he returned the pressure of her arm. "You're looking very pretty, Jeanne," he said, "I'm glad I got your note."

They sauntered slowly up Union Street, the girl chattering vivaciously, and glancing up at Carleton as she talked, with a subtle and flattering attention; Carleton for the most part listening, from time to time nodding or answering in monosyllables. At the up-town crossing they came to a brief irresolute halt. "Well," said Carleton, "and whash going to be to-night? The river?"

The girl, with a little smile, shook her head. "No," she answered capriciously, "I'm tired of the river. We've done that so often. I want a motor to-night. A nice long ride. We'll have a beautiful time."

Carleton doubtfully shook his head. He was in a distinctly contradictory mood. "Nice long ridsh," he observed, "in nice big motors, damn 'xpensive things for man that's short money. Motors 'xpensive things; so's girls."

The girl laughed, but did not lack the cleverness to see how her point might best be gained. "Are you short of money, really?" she said, with quick sympathy. "Why, you poor old Jack, it's a shame. We'll go on the river, then, in a little boat, all snug and nice. You dear boy; you need some one to comfort you," and the big blue eyes gazed up into his, bold and unashamed.

She had comprehended his mood perfectly. Instantly his tone changed. "No, no," he answered quickly, "won't do an'thing of the kind. Got little money left for frens." He laughed uncertainly. "'F you want motor, you're going t' have motor. That's all there 'sh to it. Do an'thing for you, Jeanne."

She smiled up at him with dangerous sweetness. "You're so good to me, Jack," she murmured, and the gentle pressure on his arm was in nowise diminished. "You do everything for me. I only wish sometimes I could do something for you."

He gazed down at her, all that was weakest and worst in his nature uppermost in his face. "Maybe can," he said thickly, "maybe can; come on; we're goin' get motor now."

At about the same hour that Carleton had left the Mayflower, farther up town, in the reception-room at the Press Club, Arthur Vaughan sat waiting for his friend Helmar to return. He was a young man of medium height and build, inclined to be a trifle careless about his dress; his clothes a little threadbare; his brown hair and mustache allowed to grow a little too long; his carelessly knotted tie a good year out of style. Yet his face, looked at more closely, was distinctly good; a face somewhat thin and worn; the mouth and chin nervous, sensitive; the forehead high; the brown eyes straightforward and kindly,— the eyes of a man a little detached from the world about him, a little inclined, on his way through life, unconsciously to pause and dream.

Presently the door opened, and Helmar entered, the expression on his face one of half-humorous disgust. "Same old Jack Carleton," he said. "He's not down-stairs, and it's five minutes of eight. You're sure he understood?"

Vaughan nodded. "Oh, perfectly," he answered. "I saw him Wednesday night, and told him that your meeting had been changed to Thursday, so that we'd have to put this thing over until to-night; and then I gave him Miss Graham's message, and told him he'd have to square himself with her, because we couldn't put things off again. And I remember his saying that it was all right for him; I even recall his repeating it after me, as if he wanted to make sure of it, 'seven-thirty, Press Club; eight o'clock, theater; eleven o'clock, Press Club, supper and talk'; oh, no, he understood all right. I'm sure of it."

Helmar considered. "Well," he said at length, "just because Jack's got a poor memory, I can't see why we should miss a good show. Let's leave his ticket at the desk, and if he happens to drift in, all right. Then he can come on after us. Isn't that O. K.?" and on Vaughan's assent, they left the club for the theater, where in due course the curtain rose, and later fell again upon an excellent performance, indeed, but without revealing any sign of the absent Carleton. Once outside in the street, Helmar turned to Vaughan. "Well, what next?" he queried.

Vaughan shrugged his shoulders. "Why, the supper's ordered," he answered, "so I suppose we might as well go ahead in solitary state. But it rather takes the edge off the thing. It's too bad," and a moment or two later he added, half to himself, and half to his companion, "I don't know what to think of Jack, really."

Helmar made no answer, and it was not until the supper was served in the little private room, and the waiter had withdrawn, that they again returned to the subject. "What is it about Jack, anyway?" Helmar asked. "I was out at his place the other day, and he seemed to be making no end of trouble; everybody stirred up about him. What's he been doing?"

Vaughan helplessly shook his head. "Search me," he answered, "you know I scarcely see him now. He travels with a different crowd these days. But I guess since he joined the Mayflower he's changed quite a lot; playing the market, I hear, and drinking pretty hard, and sort of gone to pieces generally."

Helmar looked thoughtful. "That's bad," he said shortly, and after a pause, "Never happen to hear any gossip about him and a girl, do you?"

Again Vaughan shook his head. "No, I don't," he answered, "if he's doing anything of that sort, it's news to me. That is, I mean, anything really out of the way. Jack likes a good time, of course; we've always known that; but I don't believe he's that kind. I guess he's all right enough that way. At any rate, I've always understood that he was about as good as engaged to Marjory Graham, and that ought to keep a fellow straight, if anything could."

Helmar nodded. "Yes," he answered abruptly, "I should say it ought. Well, never mind. Now I want to hear how things are going with you, Arthur. We'll talk about Jack later on."

And then, with the progress of the supper, the talk ran along as such talks will; each telling of past experiences, losses, gains; of future plans, hopes, fears; speaking of classmates and friends; skimming the passing events of the day; comparing notes on the thousand and one subjects that crowd the lips so readily when friends of long standing, who meet but seldom, settle down to the luxury of a leisurely, comfortable talk.

Meanwhile, far out on the Escomb Road, the big motor bowled swiftly along. Carleton's arm was around the girl's waist, her head was on his shoulder, and she was smiling up into his face. Very charming, very young and innocent she looked, unless, in some occasional passing flash of light, one could have seen the look in her eyes which lay behind the smile. "Oh, this is so nice, Jack," she murmured; even the tone of her voice was a subtle caress, and she nestled a little closer to his side; "I could keep on like this for ever; you were so good to take me, dear."

Carleton did not at once answer, and when he did, his tone seemed scarcely sentimental. Drowsiness, indeed, brought on by his many potations, rather than sentiment, appeared to be the spell which bound him, and his mind wandered irresponsibly in a dozen different directions at one and the same time. "Say," he asked suddenly, "how'd you know where a letter'd get me, anyway?"

Had the girl's mood been real, the matter-of-fact, commonplace tone must have driven her to sudden anger; as it was, her sense of humor saved her, and after a moment or two, half in spite of herself, she gave a little laugh. "Why," she answered lightly, "from your good-looking friend, Doctor Helmar, of course," and the next instant she could have bitten her tongue out for the chance words, as Carleton, for the moment startled into his senses, with a sudden exclamation sat bolt upright in his seat. "Helmar," he cried, as everything in one instant's flash came back to him, "tonight was the night. Oh, Lord, I wouldn't have done this for a thousand dollars." Then leaning forward, to the chauffeur, "Here there, you, stop a minute!" he cried; and fumbling in his pocket for his watch, he glanced at it, and then looked quickly around him. "Ten o'clock," he muttered, "we can make it;" then, aloud, "Put her round now, driver, and head her straight for town; let her out, and let her go!"

With a surprised grin, the chauffeur slowly slackened speed, reversed his power, and ponderously turned the big car about. The girl meantime protested vigorously. "No, no," she cried, "why, Jack, we're almost out there now; what do you care for him, anyway? You wouldn't do a thing like that, Jack. You've got better manners than to leave me now. How shall I get home? Now, Jack —"

Carleton, with a most disconcerting lack of gallantry, obstinately shook his head. "This very important," he said, "we'll go back way of Birches; leave you there; this 'xceedingly important. You don't understand. You never went college. Quincentennial — no, quinquecentennial, no, quinquen — oh, damn, five years out of college, that's what it is. Special dinner. Oh, what a fool I was to forget. How could I?"

The girl sat with frowning brows. "Oh, very well," she said, offended, "you needn't ask *me* to go anywhere with you again; that's all;" and then, this remark having no noticeable effect, she began softly to cry.

Instantly Carleton's shifting mood had veered again, and in a moment his arm was once more around her waist, and he leaned protectingly over her.

"Come, come," he cried, "don' do that. Can't stan' that. We'll go out there s'mother time, my dear. But not t'night, not t'night; special t'night; special; awful good fellows, both of 'em; better'n I am, damn sight. Both good fellows. Don't cry."

With a quick, sinuous movement she wrenched herself free, putting half the distance of the broad cushioned seat between them. "Don't," she cried, "I hate you!" and in constrained and moody silence the big motor whirred along upon its homeward way.

Nor was home to be gained without further misadventure. Presently, even before they had covered half the distance to The Birches, something went wrong with the machine, and the chauffeur, steering in close to the side of the road, dismounted and began to search for the trouble, spurred on by the accompaniment of Carleton's speech, which seemed every moment to gain in picturesqueness and force. Suddenly out of the darkness appeared two broad white streaks of dazzling light, the wail of a horn sounded in their ears, and another automobile passed them, to draw up, just beyond, with a quick grinding and jarring of brakes. A friendly voice hailed them. "Anything wrong? Help you out?" Carleton started at the words. He leaned forward in the seat, and whispered hastily to the chauffeur. Instantly the latter answered, "No thank you, sir, nothing wrong," and the second motor sped along upon its way. Carleton's brow contracted. "Wonder if he saw," he muttered, "light's pretty bright; looked like Marjory, too; didn't know the colonel drove much at night, anyway." There was a moment's pause; then all at once, he added, "Friday! Friday! Good God! that was the other thing. Damn the luck! Damn everything!" and mingling threats and entreaties, he renewed his urging to the worried chauffeur.

An hour later, at the Press Club, Vaughan's cigar was well under way, and Helmar was helping himself to a second cup of coffee, when suddenly the door burst open, and there appeared before them the somewhat unsteady figure of their absent friend. Before either of them could speak, he had begun a rambling and incoherent apology, continuing it as he sank limply into the chair reserved for him.

"Must 'scuse me," was the burden of his speech, "mem'ry comple'ly wen' back on me; thoroughly 'shame myself —" and there was much more in the same vein; then, all at once reaching the sentimental stage of his orgy, he began to develop a vein of maudlin self-pity: "Helmar," he cried despairingly, "you been good fren' me always. I tell you, 's no good. I try — I try 's hard's anyone — and oh, Helmar —" his voice broke, and with a mixture of the ridiculous and the pathetic that made both his hearers choke a little hysterically, even while their eyes were moist, he culminated despairingly, "'S no use, fellers; 's no use; I'll tell you where'm going; *I'm going to hell in a hack;*

thash what I am," and forthwith he laid his head upon the table, and began to weep.

It was long after midnight when Helmar and Vaughan finally deposited him, remonstrating and unwilling, in safety at the Mayflower, leaving him in skilful hands well versed in the treatment of his malady, and found themselves, flushed, weary, and not in the best of humors, again in the street.

"And so ends our great reunion," said Vaughan, mopping his heated forehead. "Jack ought to feel pleased with himself; he's certainly succeeded in knocking all the pleasure out of it for everybody, about as well as any one could. And I think, on the whole, that I'm inclined to agree with him about where he's bound."

Helmar sighed, a sigh of honest disappointment and anxiety. "Jack's a mighty good fellow," he answered, "but he's certainly in a bad way now. If he ever means to amount to anything, he's got to fight, and fight hard, too. Well, come on, Arthur, I suppose we'd better get to bed," and thus the long-planned quinquennial reunion came sadly and dismally to an end.

CHAPTER IV

A FOOL AND HIS MONEY

"Wherein I spake of most disastrous chances."
Shakespeare.

JACK CARLETON stood in front of the ticker in Turner and Driver's office, letting the narrow white ribbon run lightly through his fingers. For the moment he was alone. The big clock over on the post-office building had just boomed slowly the hour of twelve, and the little knot of customers, calmly or hurriedly, according to their several temperaments, had one by one gone out to lunch, for man must eat, though black care sit at his elbow. And indeed, though the little ticker still buzzed and whirred unceasingly, and the tape, with scarcely a halt or pause in its onward course, still ran as smoothly and persistently as ever, for the moment the worst of the drive seemed really to be over. So that presently Carleton lifted his eyes, red-rimmed and tired from the blur of black and white beneath them, letting the quotations run on unheeded, and stood with eyes fixed on the spot where, just visible through the very top of the tall window, framed in with line and bar of blackened roof and dingy chimney top, there smiled cheerfully down into the gloom of the darkened office a cloudless patch of bright blue sky.

Imperceptibly the sound of the ticker ceased, and the white ribbon began fantastically to curl and twist in his hand, for all unconsciously his fingers had closed upon it, checking the smoothness of its onward flow. The little patch of blue sky had sent his thoughts wandering far afield. A moment before he had been standing there in the office, wondering miserably whether to try to pull out, while there was yet time, with a good part of his little fortune gone, or whether, with anchors grappling desperately for holding ground, to strive somehow to ride out the storm. And now, so long had his mind run upon things trivial and unimportant, that despite the panic, despite the danger he was in, thanks to that casual upward glance, he stood already in imagination at the first tee at the Country Club, the green of the valley lying smooth and fair beneath him, the couple ahead just disappearing over the farther dip of the hill, and he himself, well-limbered up, driver in hand, in the act of placing the new white ball on the well-made tee, properly confident of smashing it out a hundred and eighty yards away, amid the close-cropped velvet of the rolling turf. Absolutely a perfect day, he reflected, for the medal round; no wind, a bright sun, greens quick, yet true — and above all, he felt that he could win. Barnes was entered, of course, and Henderson himself — he was paired with him — and Henderson had told Jake Rogers that since he had changed his grip he could " put it all over " Carleton, match or medal, any time they met. Rogers, with his little crooked smile, had taken pains, of course, to repeat the remark, and while Jack had laughed and said, " Oh, sure, he can lick me all right," in his own heart of hearts, nevertheless, he knew that he could trim Henderson, and somewhat grimly had awaited his chance. About a hundred and sixty would do it, he figured; say a seventy-nine to-day and an eighty-one to-morrow — two such perfect days in succession could hardly be — yes, about a couple of eighties would do the trick.

His vision faded as swiftly as it had come. The green of the links had vanished, and in its stead the four square walls of the office, swinging smoothly into place, had closed tightly in again upon him and his troubled fortunes. With a start, and a half-guilty flush, he glanced hastily over the yard or two of tape which he still held, looped and bent, in his tense fingers. But to his relief, as he quickly scanned the quotations, there seemed to be no cause for further immediate alarm. On the contrary, the general tone of things was still improving. Akme Mining was seventeen now, up two and a quarter; Suburban Electric had rallied to sixty-three; Fuel was up four, at eighty. With a sigh, Carleton's eyes were raised again to the patch of blue sky.

And now into the office bustled Jim Turner, hurried and preoccupied, showing plainly the nervous strain of the last three days, and especially of that grim and ghastly yesterday, when for five endless hours it had seemed that the bottom of the market, if not, indeed, of the earth itself, might be going to fall out for ever and a day; a troubled, anxious time alike for broker and customer, banker and depositor, a time when the emergency brakes had been put on so suddenly and so hard that the whole great financial stage-coach had come momentarily to a standstill, with a jar so tremendous that scores of passengers, especially those who occupied only precarious standing-room, had been hurled bodily to the ground, and some indeed, according to the stern panic-law of self-preservation, had even been quietly and with despatch pushed over the side, in order to make better the chances of those remaining for keeping in safety the threatened security of their seats.

Turner headed straight for the ticker, as he neared it striving, with an obviousness scarcely reassuring, to appear cheerful and unconcerned. "Hullo, Jack," he said, "how they coming now?" and without waiting for a reply, gathered up a dozen yards of the tape and let it pass quickly under his practised eye. "H'm," he said, almost immediately, in a tone that plainly enough showed his relief, "not so bad, are they? Quite a lot better than they were an hour ago. Oh, I guess we'll come through it somehow, after all."

His tone gave Carleton measureless comfort. He found himself nodding with assurance. "Oh, yes," he answered, "they're really a lot better. I guess things are all right now. Do you suppose, Jim —" he hesitated, stopped, and then, with a flush of color, and his eyes averted from Turner's face, "do you suppose, Jim, you'll be able to see me through?"

Turner non-committally shrugged his shoulders. "Why," he answered, not unkindly, "I guess so. Yes, if things don't go all to the devil again, I guess we can. But you're in too deep, Jack, for a man that hasn't unlimited resources. It isn't right, really. I'll stand by you as long as I can — and when I can't, I'll let you know — and then, if you can't do anything, and it gets too bad, why, business is business, Jack, and we'll have to chuck you. That's all we *can* do."

Carleton gazed at him a little helplessly; then asked, "But you think the worst's over, don't you?" He spoke so trustfully, and with such confidence in the other's judgment, that Turner gave a half-contemptuous, half-embarrassed laugh. "Why, yes," he answered slowly, "I *think* it is, but good Lord, Jack, at a time like this I'm not on the inside. I'm only one of the small fry. If I could tell you what you wanted to know, instead of just guessing at it, I wouldn't be here, working for a living; I can tell you that; I'd be over touring the continent in a big French six-cylinder. That's where I'd be." He paused a moment; then, laying a hand on Carleton's arm, continued, "But to the best of my knowledge, I really think the worst *is* over, and that things are going to right themselves. Gradually, of course; it's going to take time; but they'll right themselves, for all that. And I wouldn't worry too much, Jack, if I were you. I'll give you warning anyway, and if worst should come to worst, why, I suppose your old man would see you through, wouldn't he, if it was a case of that or bust?"

Carleton shook his head. "No, I guess not," he answered, "he would if he could, but there's something queer about the property now. I didn't know about it till a little while ago, and I don't understand all the details yet; but the idea is that my father's made Henry trustee of everything. Henry's the whole shooting-match at home now, you know. So I guess it wouldn't do to try the old gentleman. No, I've got in too deep, like a fool, and I've got to get out by myself or else drown; one of the two. But if I can only get by, this time, you can bet I'll never be such an ass again. You see, Jim," he added, ruefully enough, "I wanted to show people —"

Turner laughed, though without amusement. "Yes, I know," he said dryly, "you wanted to come the young Napoleon racket. There've been others. You needn't kick yourself for being the only one. But there must be some one that would help you out, Jack. Why couldn't you go to your uncle himself?"

He made the suggestion casually enough, yet with a shrewd eye on the younger man's expression. Carleton frowned. "Well," he answered doubtfully, "I'd hate to do that. You know what Henry and I think of each other. I suppose I could, though, if I was dead up against it. But I'm not going to worry yet." He glanced once more at the tape; then added, "Things really have steadied, haven't they, Jim? I guess we're all safe for to-day."

Turner did not at once reply. The events of the last three days had to a large extent discouraged him from hazarding further prophecies. "Can't tell," he answered guardedly, at length, "can't tell these days, but they've certainly steadied quite a bit; that's sure; perhaps they'll begin to pick up now."

As he spoke, a clerk entered with a bundle of papers in his hand. "For you to sign, Mr. Turner," he said, and Turner, taking them, departed into his private office. One or two quick lunchers, the vanguard of the returning stream of regular patrons, came in at the outer door; the first, thin, pale and dyspeptic looking, making hastily for the ticker, with no attempt to conceal his anxiety; the other, stout, red-faced, and philosophic, following more calmly, his hat on the back of his head, making leisurely exploration with a toothpick the while, evidently with a certain not unpraiseworthy desire to show that even in the throes of a panic a man could still be game. As they approached, Carleton glanced first at the tape, then at his watch, then at the patch of blue sky. The tape said that Akme Mining was seventeen and a quarter, and that Suburban Electric was sixty-four and a half; the watch said that it was twelve-fifteen, and that the twelve-thirty train would get him to the Country Club in time for lunch; the patch of blue sky said "Come." With a rather guilty haste he walked quickly toward the door, for a moment paused on the threshold, still listening to the whirring of the ticker; and then passed hurriedly out into the street.

It was Championship Cup day at the Country Club, and the locker room, when Carleton entered it two hours later, was crowded with excited men in various stages of dress and undress; men who had entered the Club five minutes before as respectable doctors, lawyers, bankers and business men, and who, five minutes later, were to emerge in a common indecorous garb of faded flannel shirt, dingy gray trousers and shapeless felt hats, making their way toward the first tee with an eagerness which in fulfilling their professional engagements, they were seldom, if ever, seen to display.

Carleton, entering, with the mechanical dexterity of long habit, almost with one motion stripped off coat and vest, collar and tie, and opening his locker, began pulling out his clubs and his battered golfing clothes. He affected not to see Henderson, thin and spare and brown, seated on a bench with knees drawn up under his chin and clasped by bare, sinewy arms.

Presently his rival rose and sauntered over to him across the room. He stood near Carleton in silence, and the two eyed each other with grins, hostile, yet friendly. Finally Henderson spoke. "Well," he observed, without enthusiasm, "how's the boy? Looking a little bit fine, what? A little bit pale for him, hey?" Carleton laughed, with elaborate disdain. "Oh, no, Tommy," he returned, "can't catch me that way. That's too old a gag. Never felt better in my life, thanks. How are they scoring? Barnes finished yet?"

Henderson nodded. "Played this morning," he said, "was going fine till the eighteenth, and then drove into the quarry, and dropped his nerve. Cost him nine for the hole, and did an eighty-five at that. Said his caddie moved just as he was swinging back for his drive; too bad, wasn't it?"

His tone belied the grief expressed by his last words, and at his humorous wink Carleton openly smiled. Both could exult in the common enjoyment of seeing a dangerous rival put out of the running. "Yes, too bad," he rejoined, "his eighty-five the best?"

Henderson shook his head. "No," he answered, "fellow from Brooklawn did an eighty-three. Nothing much else under ninety, though; one or two eighty-nines, I believe, and an eighty-eight; better get limbered up a bit, Jack; it's getting near our turn. See you outside."

Carleton nodded, tightened his belt another hole, and reached for his clubs. Then, for a moment turning his back on the crowded room, he held out his hand, scanning the fingers critically. His ideas of conditioning himself were his own. He frowned slightly, shaking his head in displeasure. "That's the first time that's happened again so soon," he muttered, "I thought I looked out for that this morning. Well, I know the answer, anyway," and a couple of minutes later, wiping his lips with his handkerchief, he joined Henderson outside the club-house, and began leisurely to limber up.

It was a quarter of an hour later when, in answer to their names, they stepped forward to the first tee. Henderson, having the honor, surveyed his footing with care, and then, absolutely cool and phlegmatic, teed his ball, eyed the direction flag waving on the cop bunker some seventy yards away, and with his provokingly easy swing drove a ball without much "ginger" behind it, a trifle high yet superlatively safe, unerring in direction and with some distance to it as well, for the road was a full hundred and fifty yards from the tee, and the little white sphere stood out plainly against the green of the turf some twenty yards beyond. Still with the utmost deliberation he stepped back off the tee, and Carleton took his place. His style was almost the antithesis of Henderson's. His tee was scarcely more than a pinch of the damp sand, just enough to insure a good lie for his ball; almost negligently, it seemed, he fell at once into his stance, swinging back with an astonishing freedom, yet with complete mastery of a somewhat dashing style, and coming through into a finish absolutely superb. Low and straight sped his ball, hardly more than twenty feet over the top of the bunker; then, beginning slowly to rise, soaring magnificently onward, finally to come to a stop some fifty or sixty yards beyond the road. Henderson whistled as they walked down the path. "Some one's feeling fine," he said. "Glad you got in one good one, anyway, Jack."

Carleton smiled grimly. "Oh, a few more at home like that I guess," he retorted, "you've got to crack an eighty to-day, Tommy, if you want to be in the game."

His second shot, indeed, seemed to bear out his words. Henderson had taken an iron, cleared the bunker that guarded the green, and was safely on its farther edge in two, but Carleton, playing a high, clean mashie, with plenty of back-spin, managed to lay his ball up within a dozen feet of the flag. On the green Henderson putted true and straight, his ball stopping so near the hole as to make a four a certainty. Carleton, with a little more deliberation than he had yet shown, eyed the line of his put. "Easy," he muttered to himself, half-aloud, "nothing to it; easiest thing you know; just get the line, follow her through, and she — goes — *down.*"

With the final word the ball ticked against the farther edge of the cup, and dropped gently in for a three. Henderson, holing out, whistled again. "Somebody's got their good eye with 'em," he observed, and Carleton, picking up his ball, drew a long breath of content. "Oh, the devil," he answered good-naturedly, "this is one of my days; I can do anything I want to to 'em to-day;" and in silence they strode away for the second tee.

Outward for the first nine holes they played, into a world, green under foot and blue and white above, the sunshine just pleasantly warm, the cool westerly breeze barely stirring the green leaves in the treetops, and faintly rousing the drooping direction flags below. A world of good-fellowship, a world of youth and joy, and withal, the rigor of the game to make them at times wholly unconscious, at times all the more conscious, of the glory above, around, beneath them. Henderson, the safe and sane, was on his game, making the first nine holes in an even forty, but Carleton played beyond himself. Twice only on the outward journey did he make mistakes, and for both he atoned by pulling off two shots well-nigh marvelous — one a clean, slashing brassie that put him on the edge of the green on the long fifth — four hundred and fifty yards — in two; one a straight, deadly put of twenty-five feet at the eighth; no wonder that Henderson unwillingly totaled a thirty-six for his rival, puckered his lips, but this time without the whistle, and mournfully shook his head. Coming in, indeed, Carleton's pace slackened a bit, and his playing became, in Henderson's phrase, "considerably more like a human being's." Mistakes, one or two of them costly, were not lacking; his putting fell off a bit; his confidence seemed a little to diminish; yet, spite of all, he still played brilliantly, and when on the eighteenth, he drove a long, straight ball, far over the quarry, with no danger between him and the home hole, Henderson was forced to admit defeat. He himself finished as steadily as ever, coming in without any serious error, without anything especially brilliant, with a card all fours and fives, in forty-two, and thus handed it an eighty-two for the round. Carleton's card in was more irregular; it was marred by two sixes, but these were balanced by two threes and an occasional four, altogether forty-one for the second nine, and a total of seventy-seven. Surely, the gold medal lay all but in his grasp, and Henderson, indeed, had the grace to acknowledge it. "You're all right, Jack," he said, as they parted, "see you to-morrow afternoon, but I guess you've got things cinched; this is your lucky day;" and Carleton, though perforce he shrugged his shoulders and said that no one could ever tell, felt in his heart that the prize was as good as won.

At the club-house he dressed, and then, finding that he had plenty of time, walked leisurely down to the train, and started back for town. For a while, just comfortably tired with the afternoon's round, he was content to sit back in his seat with passive enjoyment, with eyes half closed, playing over again each stroke of the round in pleasant retrospect, again smashing straight low balls from the tee, again laying up his approach shots, again successfully holing long, difficult puts. It made pleasant enough dreaming, and he sat thus until Hillside was reached.

Then suddenly, two men, entering hurriedly, took the vacant seat behind him, evidently resuming their conversation where it had been broken off as they had boarded the train. Their first words drove golf a million miles from his brain. "So it busted clean to hell, did it?" asked the stout man, panting with haste and excitement.

"Did it?" echoed his companion, with a certain dismal pride, the sense of proprietorship that one gains in the communication of bad news, "well, I should say it did. Didn't begin till two o'clock, and then, say, you never saw such a time in your life. Smash — Bang — Smash! Everything thrown over, right and left; why, down at Wellman's —"

The train roared into the long tunnel, and the rest of the sentence was lost. It was enough, and Carleton, sitting motionless, felt a sudden sickening reaction creep over him. A game of golf — a gold medal — and the market again in the grip of a panic beside which the first break of three days ago must have been as nothing. And then, insistently, he began to wonder — how bad — how bad? His margin had been slender enough before — hardly sufficient, really, to pass muster unless tinctured with the dangerous kindness of friendship — he clenched his hands; his mouth had gone suddenly dry —

Inside the smoky station the train came to a halt. Alighting, he paused to buy the evening papers from a clamorous newsboy; then without stopping even to glance at them, hastened straight to his office. It was long after the hour of closing. The office boy was gone, the door made fast. Unlocking it, he entered, sat down at his desk, and began hastily to examine the letters and memoranda reposing there. "Ring up Mr. Turner," was penciled half a dozen times in the office boy's round, sprawling hand, with various additions, "Important," "Urgent," "At once." "Ring 698, Lincoln;" that was Harris and Wheeler's; "Ring Main, 422;" that was Claxton Brothers. He turned to the papers. Lord above, what headlines! Panic — market crash — houses suspended — banks in danger — half dazed, he gazed for a moment around him, as if doubting that it could all be real; then, with a grim feeling that nothing could much matter now, he read steadily the long rows of stock quotations; and ever, as he read down a column, values dropped downward with him, and never, as he turned to the top of the next, did they rise again. Once more he had to stop, unable to grasp the truth; Akme Mining, nine and a half; Suburban Electric, forty-seven; Fuel, sixty-three; it was all impossible.

Through the slide in the office door a letter fluttered gently to the floor. He rose and picked it up. It had Turner's name in the corner. Inside was a hasty scrawl, "Things very bad; must have ten thousand additional margin at opening to-morrow, sure." As he laid it down, the telephone rang; "Yes," he answered, "Mr. Harris; oh, yes, I know; five thousand; yes; thanks; you've got to have it at the opening; all right; good-by." He hung up the receiver, and turned to confront a telegraph boy at his elbow. He hastily signed, and ripped open the envelope. This time the laconic message was from Claxton Brothers. "Good," he muttered, "only five thousand more. This is fine," and he threw himself back in his office chair, and for a moment or two thought hard. Then he smiled ironically. "Oh, yes," he muttered, "Henderson got it right, as usual; this is certainly my lucky day;" then after a moment, he added, "Well, I suppose it's a case of must now. It's all I *can* do." He rose, shrugging his shoulders, and thrusting the papers into his pocket, he hurriedly left the office.

CHAPTER V

A QUESTION OF HONOR

> "What is left when honour is lost?"
>
> *Publius Syrus.*

TWILIGHT was falling over The Birches, and Edward Carleton, seated alone on the piazza, gazed out over the darkening fields into a world of ever blending shadows and onward creeping dusk. Always, as long as the weather permitted, after his evening meal, he loved to sit there, puffing quietly at his big, old-fashioned, curved pipe, and letting his memory roam back at will through scene after scene from the long years that now lay behind him; or sometimes, more rarely, living in the present, content merely to gaze out on blossoming flower, and tree in full leaf; to watch the fiery colors of the sunset glow and die in the far-off west; to hear from the orchard across the road a robin singing his good-night song; to listen to the thousand wonderful secrets which Nature at the last loves to whisper to those who have lived their lives pure in deed and word, and who have journeyed far onward into the shadow, still kindly and serene, with the wonderful dreams of childhood making beautiful their minds, and in their hearts the faith of little children.

Often Henry Carleton sat there with him, but to-night the old man was alone. An hour ago, a message had come from Henry, saying that he would not be home until the following evening — perhaps not even then — that business matters of importance had arisen, making it necessary that he should remain in town. Characteristic of Henry Carleton's unfailing thoughtfulness the message had been, and it was of his brother, and, with a half-sigh, of Jack as well, that Edward Carleton was thinking now, as the darkness pressed closer and closer around the old house that had sheltered for so many generations so many fathers and sons of the Carleton blood.

From the entrance to the gravel walk, the sound of footsteps smote briskly on his ear and he glanced up to see a tall and familiar figure coming up the path. A moment later, and Jack had hastily mounted the steps, scarce seeming to heed his father's greeting, and speaking at once, in a voice strangely unlike his own. "Father," he said, "where's Henry?"

The old man gazed at him in surprise. "He's not at home, Jack," he answered, and then, with a momentary foreboding, "What is it, my boy? Nothing wrong?"

Jack laughed, a little grimly. "No, nothing like that," he answered, "I'm in trouble, that's all. I've stayed too long in a falling market, and got caught. If I can't get help from Henry, I guess I'm done."

In the darkness Edward Carleton reached out his hand, and laid it on his son's shoulder. "My dear boy," he said, "I'm sorry. If only Henry has the money available. But I don't know. These must be terrible times for every one. Tell him if there's any way he can use what he holds for me, that I asked him to do so. I'm so sorry, Jack — so sorry —"

With what was for him unusual feeling, Jack took his father's hand in both his own. "Thank you, father," he said, "I know you are. It's all my own fault, of course. I don't deserve any help. But it's all come so suddenly. I never thought —"

He broke off abruptly, then spoke again. "Well, I suppose I must get back in town, I haven't much time. I never dreamed of not finding Henry here. I'm sorry I can't stay. Good night, father," and he was gone.

It was nearly two hours later when he hastened down Adams Street toward the Harmon Building, where high overhead in many a window, lights ordinarily extinguished by five or six o'clock, were still burning brightly; some of them, indeed, destined to gleam and flicker throughout that long, anxious summer's night, and only to pale at last as the first faint streaks of dawn struck through the shades on the men who planned and toiled within, working feverishly, with gray, unshaven faces, and weary, bloodshot, deep-sunken eyes.

Getting out of the elevator at the fourth floor, Jack hastily made his way into Henry Carleton's offices. Once there, however, although his name was quickly sent in, he was compelled to wait for a full half hour in the outer corridor, until at length a bell rang sharply, and a tired looking clerk, with a nod of his head toward the inner office, signified that the audience was granted. With a curious sense of old-time familiarity, Jack entered the big square room which he had visited last, now upward of three years ago, and closed the door behind him.

Over by the window, Henry Carleton was seated at his desk. He was a man of about fifty, in complexion so dark as to appear almost swarthy, and with coal black hair and beard, here and there just faintly touched with gray. He was tall, much of Jack's height and build, yet constructed upon finer lines, with a sinuous grace of movement that had about it something almost feline. His face was rather long, the forehead and cheek-bones high, the eyes were black and piercing, and the lips of the strong, well-chiseled mouth noticeably full and red. Altogether, an interesting face, a fitting index to the dual personality of the man — Henry Carleton the shrewd and able leader in the business world, and Henry Carleton the musician and man of letters — the artist to his finger-tips.

As Jack entered, he glanced up pleasantly enough, though far back in his eyes there lurked a hidden gleam of some emotion difficult to fathom. "Why, hello, Jack," he said, "I'm surprised to see *you*. What brings you here? Sit down." He motioned toward a chair.

Jack Carleton came forward into the room, standing a little awkwardly with his hand on the back of the proffered seat. "It's the market, Henry," he said briefly, "I've got caught. I have to raise twenty thousand by the opening to-morrow, or go under. I've just come from home; I thought I'd find you there. I'll tell you the truth. I hate like hell to come to you, and you know it, but I've got to get the money somehow, and if you can help me, I wish to Heaven you would."

Henry Carleton gazed at him meditatively. "Better sit down," he said curtly, and this time Jack accepted the invitation. There was a short silence. Then Henry Carleton drew a tiny note-book from his pocket, and looked up, with pencil poised, "Now let's have it," he said.

Jack Carleton frowned. It was easy enough to see that the confession of his sins was little less than torture to him. "Well," he began, a trifle defiantly, "it's like this. I've got in a trifle deeper than I meant to when I started. Things looked so like a cinch, I couldn't help it. I've fifteen hundred shares of Surburban Electric, and seven hundred Akme Mining, and five hundred Fuel, and a little other stuff besides. My heaviest account's with Turner and Driver; then I've got an account with Harris and Wheeler, and another with Claxton Brothers; altogether —"

Piece by piece the whole story came out. Henry Carleton wrote, figured, meditated; asked a question here, another there; meditated again. Finally he seemed to make up his mind. He spoke with deliberation, weighing his words. "No one can tell," he said, "what the next twenty-four hours are going to bring. But what you ought to do is clear. You've got to lighten up, to start with. Close out your account with Harris, and with the

Claxtons; hang on to what you have at Turner and Driver's, if you can. That's enough; and that's our problem: how best to try to carry it through."

As if the words brought him measureless comfort, Jack drew a long breath of relief. "You think, then," he asked, almost timidly, "you can fix it somehow? You think you can get me by?"

Henry Carleton did not at once reply, and when he finally spoke, it was but to answer Jack's question with another. "Have you done everything you can yourself?" he queried. "Where else have you tried?"

Jack gave a short mirthless laugh. "Where *haven't* I tried?" he retorted. "I've tackled about every friend and acquaintance I've got in the world. I began four days ago. And I've had the same identical come-back from every one of them. They're sorry, but they have to look out for themselves first. And security. They all talk about that. I never knew before that security cut such a lot of ice with people. But it does."

Henry Carleton nodded grimly. "Yes, it does," he answered dryly, "most of us make that discovery sooner or later. And generally for ourselves, too. And when you mention security, Jack, you've come right down to the root of the whole trouble. We might as well acknowledge it now. I can't help you myself. I tell you so frankly. I couldn't use trust funds for such a purpose, of course. Any one would tell you that. That's out of the question. And my own money is hopelessly tied up. I couldn't get the sum you need under a month, if I could then. But there's one thing I might do. It isn't business. I hate to try it. But I don't want to see you disgraced, Jack, if I can help it. Wait here a minute, till I see —"

He rose and walked over to the telephone booth in the rear of his office, and entering, closed the door behind him. In two minutes he came back to his desk, penciled a name on a card, and handed it to Jack. "This fellow Farrington," he said shortly, "is under some obligations to me. I think you'll get what you want from him. Better see him anyway. He's in the Jefferson Building, top floor. I told him you'd be there in ten minutes, at the most."

Jack Carleton rose. "I'm much obliged,

Henry," he said, a little lamely, "you're very good. I'm much obliged. I'll go right over, of course."

The other stood gazing at him with a curious expression on his swarthy face, a curious gleam far back in his dark eyes. "Don't mention it," he said smoothly, "Carletons must stand together, Jack. We mustn't bring dishonor on the name, whatever we do."

Unerringly he had pierced the weak joint in the armor. Jack's face went whiter than before. He stood for a moment silent, then spoke with effort. "No," he answered, "we mustn't do that," and turning, he left the room.

Up-town toward the Jefferson Building he hurried, half-daring, yet half-fearing, to hope. Noting the number of the room on the framed directory placarded within, he left the elevator at the tenth floor, and hastening down the corridor, paused opposite the door. Externally the office was a modest one, with "H. O. Farrington, Agent" inscribed in plain black lettering on the glass. Entering, he found the interior to correspond. A tiny room, with a small enclosure at one end, within which sat

Farrington himself, a man perhaps best described by saying that he perfectly typified that somewhat vague being whom most of us have in mind when we speak glibly of the "average man." "Average" best described him in height, build, and appearance, the nondescript sort of person whom one meets on Monday, and passes in the street on Tuesday, wholly unconscious of ever having seen him before.

As Jack entered, he glanced up quickly. "Mr. Carleton?" he questioned, and as Jack nodded, motioned to a chair. "Just a minute," he said, and bent over his writing again. Presently, as he stopped, and reached for a sheet of blotting paper, Jack ventured to speak. "I don't know how much you know about this —" he began, but the other raised his hand. "All right," he said briefly, and shoved a check and a receipt across the desk, "Sign, please."

Mechanically Jack glanced at the check. It was for the amount required. Mechanically, too, he signed the receipt, and handed it back to Farrington. Half unable to realize his good fortune, he rose, the check in his hand. "I'm greatly obliged," he said.

Farrington made no reply. Evidently words with him were precious things. Perforce Jack turned to go, and then, half-way to the door, turned.

"Mr. Farrington," he said hesitatingly, "if things should go lower —"

Farrington did not look up. "They won't," he said tersely.

Again Jack hesitated. Then, finally, "But if they should —" he said again.

A little impatiently, Farrington raised his head. "We'll see you through," he said. "Good night." And Jack, not disposed to quarrel further with fortune, closed the door behind him.

It was a quarter of ten on the morning following when he entered Turner and Driver's office, advancing to meet the senior partner with the little strip of paper in his outstretched hand. Turner took it eagerly enough, and as he scanned the amount, he nodded, while a wrinkle or two seemed to vanish from his puckered and frowning brow.

Then he looked up. "Well, you got it," he said, and Carleton hastened to assent. "Oh, yes," he returned lightly, "I got it all right. Why, didn't you think I would?"

The broker shrugged his shoulders. "Hard telling anything these days," he answered, "but I'll tell you one thing, though; you're mighty lucky to be able to put your hands on it so easy. There'll be more than one poor devil this morning who would pretty near give his soul for a tenth part of what you've got here. It's a bad time for customers, Jack, and I don't mind telling you —" he lowered his voice confidentially —"that it's a bad time for brokers, too. A little piece of paper like this —" he waved the check gently to and fro — "is a nice comforting sight for a man; between you and me, I wouldn't mind seeing three or four mates to it. Yes, I'm glad to get it all right, on my account, and on yours, too."

Jack nodded. Somehow, entirely without justification, as he well knew, the check had given him a feeling of great stability; at once, on receiving it, he had felt that he had risen in his own self-esteem.

"Yes," he assented, "I'm glad myself; and you needn't worry about my account, Jim. We'll just leave it this way. Don't treat mine as an ordinary account; don't sell me out, whatever happens. I've friends that'll see me through anything. If things should go lower, and you should need more margin, just let me know, and I'll get it over to you right away. Will that be satisfactory?"

The broker nodded. "Why, yes, Jack," he answered, "knowing the way you're fixed, I guess that'll be all right, though with nine men out of ten, of course I wouldn't consider such a way of doing things. Business is business, and when it comes right down to the fine point, why, it's the cold hard cash that counts, and nothing else; not friendship, or honor, or gratitude, or common decency, even —" both face and voice had hardened as he spoke; it was not his first panic — and then his look met Carleton's fairly and squarely. "But with you, Jack," he continued, "it's different, as I say. Only let's be perfectly sure that we understand each other. I don't believe myself, you know, that things can go much lower; I think the chances are they've steadied for good; but for argument, let's suppose they do. Then, as I understand it, you don't want to have me sell you out at any price, no matter how far they break. You'll make good any time I ask you to. You give me your word on that?"

Carleton readily enough assented. "Why, sure," he answered lightly, "of course I do; you needn't worry; I'll make good," and the broker nodded, well pleased.

"One thing less to bother over, then," he said. "You'll excuse me now, Jack, won't you? This is going to be a horrible busy day, anyway, and the Lord send it's nothing worse than that; it wouldn't take much now to raise the very deuce."

As he spoke the *News Despatch* boy entered, tossing down on the table a half dozen sheets fresh from the press. Turner glanced at them, and handed them over to Carleton, shaking his head as he did so. "London's not feeling gay," he observed, "I call that a pretty ragged opening myself. I don't know what you think of it."

Carleton read and nodded. It seemed as if everything in the half dozen pages made for discouragement. London had opened weak — lamentably weak. There were rumors of this — rumors of that — sickly, unhealthy mushroom growths of the night. There was talk of failures — suspensions — financial troubles of every kind — even the good name of a great bank was bandied carelessly to and fro. Silently Turner crossed the room, and took his seat at his desk; silently Carleton walked out into the customers' room, and joined the other unfortunates who had come slowly straggling in, and who now stood around the ticker, waiting gloomily and apprehensively for the opening bell to ring.

The tension of the moment was plainly enough to be read in the attitudes and expressions of the members of the little group, not one of whom failed in some manner or other to betray the fact that he was far from possessing his usual poise and calm. Most of them, either consciously or unconsciously, showed their nervousness so plainly and even painfully that it was impossible to misinterpret the anxious glances cast first at the clock, then at the tape, as the moment of the opening drew near. One or two, indeed, essayed a nonchalance so obviously assumed as to render even more apparent the emotion it sought to conceal. One young fellow, with hat shoved far back on his head, hair in disorder, and a restless, frightened look in his eyes, glanced at Carleton as he approached.

"How *you* standing it, Jack?" he queried, with a faint attempt at jocularity. "Bad night to sleep last night, *I* called it; guess most likely 'twas something in the air."

Another man, he of the toothpick, stout and coarse, held forth at some length for the benefit of the rest. "Oh, it was perfectly clear, the whole thing," he was saying, with the air of one to whom all the mysteries and marvels of stock fluctuations are but as matters writ large in print the most plain. "You see Rockman and Sharp and Haverfeller got together on this thing, and then they had a conference with Horgan, and got him to say that he'd keep his hands off, and let things alone; then they had a clear chance, and you can see what they've done with it; oh, they're clever all right; when those fellows get together, it's time to look out; you can't beat 'em."

He spoke with a certain condescending finality, as if he had somehow once and for all fixed the status of the panic. After a moment or two a gray, scholarly looking little man, with gentle, puzzled eyes, addressed him, speaking with an air of timid respect for the stout man's evident knowledge.

"Do you imagine, sir," he asked, "that securities will decline still further in value? If they should, I am afraid that I might find myself seriously involved. I can't seem to understand this whole affair; I was led to believe —"

The big man, charmed with the novelty of having a genuine, voluntary listener, interrupted him at once.

"Oh, you don't have to worry," he said largely, "they might open 'em off a little lower, perhaps, but they'll go back again. Don't you fret; the country's all right; they'll come back; they always do."

The little man seemed vastly comforted. "I'm very glad to hear you say so," he answered. "It would come very hard — I had no idea the risk was so great — I was led to believe —"

The young man with the rumpled hair turned a trifle disgustedly to Carleton. "Heard from London?" he asked abruptly. His brief, and not wholly unintelligent connection with the game had led him to believe firmly in facts and figures, not in the dangerous pastime of theorizing over values, or speculating as to what the next move of the "big fellows" might be.

Carleton nodded. "Weak," he answered, his tone pitched low and meant for his neighbor's ear only, "horribly weak; and all sorts of stories starting, too; it looks as bad as it could."

The young man nodded. "I supposed so," he said, with resignation, and then added whimsically, "Well, there's no use crying about it, I guess, but it certainly looks as if this was the time when little Willie gets it good and plenty, right in the neck."

Just in front of them, a pale, slender man, with blinking eyes, and a mumbling, trembling mouth that was never still, talked steadily in an under-tone, apparently partly to himself, partly to the man who stood at his shoulder, a red-faced farmer with a hundred shares of Akme at stake. "Now'd be the time," he muttered, "now'd be the time to jump right in; jump right in and buy four or five thousand shares; a man could make a fortune, and get out for good; it's the chance of a man's life; to jump right in and buy four or five thousand shares."

The countryman gazed at him in silence, sizing him up at first curiously, and then with a certain amused and not unkindly contempt. "Four or five thousand!" he said, at last. "That ain't enough. Buy ten thousand while you're at it. You'll get twice as rich then," but the nervous man seemed to take no offense, and indeed, not even to notice the remark. "Now's the time," he rambled on, and it was clear that it was to himself alone that his mumblings were addressed, "to jump right in; that's the thing to do."

To Carleton, all at once it seemed that the group around the ticker was a gathering merely of the wrecks of men — of idle fools of greater or less degree. All of them he pitied, except the big, coarse man with the toothpick, for whom he felt a huge dislike; and most of all his pity went out to the gentle man with the puzzled eyes; something unfair there seemed to be in such a one being decoyed into the market game — something repellant, as if one had lied, deliberately and maliciously, to a child. Pity or anger — old or young — was there in all the group, he reflected with sudden distaste, one real man? And then, instant and unexpected, a lightning flame of keenest irony seemed to sear its way into his very soul; suppose Farrington had withheld the check? Was there, in all the group, *himself included,* one real man —

The bell rang. The ticker whirred. For a moment the dozen heads were grouped closely together over the tape, and then — the first quotation, five hundred Fuel at fifty-seven, gave warning of the truth; and the second and third verified it beyond all doubt or questioning. No further need of argument; no further agony; the suspense was over. So weak was the opening as to be almost incredible, so weak that it took a moment or two to adjust oneself to the shock. Akme Mining had closed the night before at ten. Carleton, figuring on the lowest, had imagined that it might open at eight and a half, or even eight. Two thousand shares came over the tape at six and a quarter. Everything else was in like ratio; everything else kept the same proportion — or lack of it. For perhaps ten seconds there was silence absolute, and then the reaction came. The young man with the rumpled hair turned sharply away, his hands thrust deep into his trousers' pockets, his lips curiously twisted and contorted, the tip of his tongue showing between his teeth. He gazed up at the blank wall, nodding unsmilingly to himself. "I thought so," he observed, quietly, "in the neck."

The man with the mumbling mouth started again to speak. "Now," he muttered, "now would be the time; to jump right in —" and then, as if just for a moment he caught a glimpse of himself and the figure he made, old and futile, worn out and wan, he stopped abruptly, rubbing his eyes, and for a time spoke no more, only standing there motionless, with the force of a habit too strong to be broken, glancing down unseeingly at the rows of little black letters and figures that issued steadily from the ticker, only to pass, unregarded and unmeaning, beneath the vacancy of his gaze.

Carleton had stood staring grimly with the rest. In a moment he felt a hand laid upon his arm, and turned to meet the wistful glance of the little gray man. "I beg your pardon," he asked timidly, "but can you tell me at what price Kentucky Coal is selling? I dislike to trouble you, but I am entirely unfamiliar with the abbreviations used."

Carleton nodded with the feeling that he might as well deal the little man a blow squarely between the eyes. "Forty-eight," he said shortly.

The little man turned very pale. "Forty-eight," he repeated mechanically, "can it be so? Forty-eight!" He shook his head slowly from side to side, then glanced at Carleton with a smile infinitely gentle and pathetic. "And to earn it," he murmured, "took me twenty years;" and then again, after a pause, "twenty years; and I'm afraid I'm pretty old to begin again now."

Carleton's heart smote him. Gladly enough would he have sought to aid, if a half of his own depleted fortune had remained to him. He stood for a moment as if in a dream. The whole scene — the familiar office, the stock-board, the ticker, the disheartened, discouraged group of unsuccessful gamblers — it was all real enough, and yet at the same time about it all there clung an air somehow theatric, melodramatic, hard of realization. Then, from the doorway, Turner called him sharply, and he hastened into the private office. Outwardly, the broker still had a pretty good grip on himself, but in his tone his rising excitement was easily enough discerned. "Look, Jack," he said quickly, "things are bad; there's all sorts of talk coming over our private wire. Hell's broke loose; that's the amount of it. I want you to get me ten thousand on your account as quick as the Lord'll let you; get fifteen, if you can. It's better for us both that way. Saves worrying — any more than anybody can help. And Jack," he added, "I'm not supposed to know this, neither are you. But they're letting go a raft of your father's stuff over at Brown's. I don't know what the devil it means, but I call it a mighty bad sign."

Carleton nodded, and without wasting time, left the room. The ten minutes' walk between Turner's office and the Jefferson Building he covered in half that time, and striding hastily down the corridor, had almost reached Farrington's door when a tall, red-faced young man, emerging with equal speed, pulled up short to avoid the threatened collision, and stood back for Carleton to enter. Glancing at him, Jack recognized a casual acquaintance, and nodded to him as he passed. "How are you, Cummings?" he said, and the other, looking at him a little curiously, returned his salutation, and then passed quickly on.

Farrington was seated at his desk, and Jack at once, and without ceremony, entered. Farrington, glancing up, acknowledged his greeting, with a curt nod; then looked at him with questioning gaze. "Well?" he said.

"Well," Jack echoed, a trifle deprecatingly, "you can guess what I've come for, I suppose. You saw the opening. I want ten thousand more — fifteen, if I can have it — but ten will do."

Farrington looked him straight in the eye.

"Ten will do," he echoed; then, dryly, "I should think it would." He paused for the veriest instant, then added, with the utmost directness, "It's no go, Mr. Carleton. I'm caught myself. I can't let you have a cent."

At the words the blood seemed suddenly to leave Jack Carleton's heart. Something tightened in his throat, and a faint mist seemed to gather between Farrington's face and his own. Then, as he came to himself, "Can't let me have it!" he cried sharply. "Why, you told me last night you'd see me through, you won't go back on your word now. The money's promised. It's too late."

Farrington's face was expressionless. "You don't realize," he said, "what a time this is. It's one day out of a million — the worst there's ever been. If I could have foreseen —"

The telephone on his desk rang sharply, and he turned to answer it. Jack Carleton sat as if stunned. This man had lied to him; had given him his word, and now, with the market hopelessly lower, retracted it; had thrown him a rope, and, as he hung helpless in mid air, was leaning coolly forward to cut it, and let him perish. And he had promised Turner — his word of honor. He felt physically faint and sick. Farrington hung up the receiver, and then, as Jack started to speak, an interruption occurred. Suddenly the door opened, and Cummings appeared in the entrance. He seemed greatly hurried and excited, as if he had been running hard. "All ready, Hal," he cried, "he'll ring you any minute now. And when he does, buy like hell! For the personal, of course! He says —"

Quickly Farrington cut in on him. "Shut up!" he cried, so sharply that Jack could not but note his tone, "Can't you see I'm busy? Wait outside, till I'm through," and Cummings, his red face many shades redder than before, at once hastily withdrew.

Immediately Carleton leaned forward. "Look here," he cried desperately, "this isn't right. You told me you'd see me through. Those were your very words. You can't go back on them now. If you do, you've got me ruined — worse than ruined. It isn't only the money; I've pledged my word; pledged myself to make good. I've got to have it, Farrington; that's all; I've got to; can't you understand?"

Farrington frowned. "You *can't* have it," he answered sharply, "and don't take that tone to me, either, Mr. Carleton. Haven't I given you twenty thousand already? You must have misunderstood me last night. I said I'd see you through if I could, and now I find I can't. That's all. I tell you I can't; and I won't stop to split hairs about it, either. I've got too much at stake. You'd better not wait, Mr. Carleton. There's no use in it. There's nothing for you here."

Carleton's eyes blazed. Just for an instant things swam before him; for an instant he half crouched, like an animal about to spring. In the office, absolute stillness reigned, save for the tall clock in the corner ticking off the seconds — five — ten — fifteen — and then, all at once, his tightly closed hands unclenched, his lips relaxed; on the instant he stood erect, and without speaking, turned quickly on his heel, and left the room.

Grim and white of face, he burst five minutes later into Turner's private office, with a bearing so changed that Turner could not help but notice it, and read the trouble there. "Something wrong?" he asked sharply, and Carleton nodded, with a strange feeling as if he were acting a part in some sinister dream. "I couldn't get it," he said.

Turner gazed at him, frowning. "Nonsense," he cried, and Carleton could have laughed hysterically to hear his own words of ten minutes before coming back to him: "You've got to get it. You told me you were all right, Jack. You can't do this now. Last night was the time to settle or sell. You can't turn around now. It's too late."

Carleton's face was haggard, his mouth dry. He shook his head stubbornly. "I can't get it," he said again.

The broker's eyes grew suddenly hard. "Of course you can," he cried, "you said you could; you know you can get it, Jack; go ahead!"

But Carleton only shook his head once more. "It's no use," he answered wearily, "I *can't* get it, I say. I wouldn't lie to you."

It was an unfortunate phrase. The broker sneered. "Oh, no," he cried, "of course not.

You wouldn't lie to me. How about this morning?" And then, struck suddenly by the expression on Carleton's face, and perhaps a little ashamed of his own loss of self-control, he hastened to add, in a tone kindlier by far, "Come, come, Jack, this isn't like you. There's something queer here. You told me you had friends who'd see you through. You told me that not three hours ago. And if you lied to me, it was a dirty thing to do, and a foolish thing, as well. Because now I've got to sell you out; there's no other way; and it leaves you ruined, and costs me money, besides. But I won't preach. Thank God, that's one thing I've never done yet. You've been a good customer here, and a good friend of mine, too. So give it to me straight, Jack. If you lied to me, tell me so. It's bad enough for you; I won't make it any worse. I'll keep my head shut, and you can pay me back as you're able. But now look here —" and his tone hardened again —" if it isn't that; if it's somebody else that's lied to *you*, and fooled us both, why that's a different story altogether. There's nothing to stop us then, and by God, we won't let it stop us, either. We'll tell the story all over this town, till we make somebody good and sorry for what he's done. Give it to me straight, Jack. How did it happen? Is this whole business up to somebody else, or is it up to you? Was it the truth you told me, or was it a lie?"

For a moment Carleton stood silent. Through his tired brain flashed evil thoughts — suspicion — conjecture — the possibility of a just revenge. And yet — it was all so confused — so uncertain. Blame there was somewhere — but where? What could he really do? And then, curiously enough, once more he seemed to see before his eyes the dark face of Henry Carleton; once again he seemed to hear him say, "The Carletons must stand together, Jack. We mustn't bring dishonor on the name." And in that sudden instant Jack Carleton ceased all at once to be a boy, and became a man. Low and hesitating came the words, the words that in the broker's eyes branded him for ever as a coward, beaten and disgraced, and yet his gaze, fixed on Turner's face, never faltered. "Jim," he said, "I'm sorry. It's up to me. I told you a lie."

CHAPTER VI

DEATH COMES

> "Nothing is here for tears, nothing to wail
> Or knock the breast, no weakness, no contempt,
> Dispraise, or blame,—nothing but well and fair,
> And what may quiet us in a death so noble."
>
> *Milton.*

THROUGH the gathering darkness of the short, chilly December day the carriage swung up the driveway of The Birches, and in front of the porch came to a sudden halt. Doctor Morrison, hastily alighting, ran quickly up the piazza steps to find Henry Carleton, worried and anxious, already awaiting him at the open door.

"I'm glad you've come, Doctor," he said, his relief plainly enough showing in his tone, "I've been reproaching myself for not letting you know before. Step into the parlor for a moment, though, and warm yourself before you go up. You must be cold."

Pulling off his gloves, and laying aside his overcoat and bag, Doctor Morrison followed Carleton into the room, rubbing his hands and holding them out to the warmth of the open blaze. Then he turned. "And how is he now?" he asked. "Any change for the worse?"

"No, I think not," Carleton answered, "he appears to be comfortable enough, and says he has no pain. Yet there seems something curious about it, too. It was almost a week ago, I suppose, that he first began to complain. There was nothing that you could fix on definitely, though. Only that he didn't seem to be quite himself — not as bright as usual, or so interested in things — and wanted to sleep a great deal, even in the daytime; something, as you know, most unusual for him. I thought then of sending for you, and then I felt that that might alarm him, and to tell the truth, I expected every day to see him begin to pick up again; he's had times like this before. And so things went along until to-day. But this morning, as I telephoned you, he didn't get up at all — complained of feeling very weak and faint — so of course I rang you up at once. I only hope I've made no mistake in waiting so long."

Doctor Morrison shook his head. "Oh, no, I don't think so for a moment," he answered, "I doubt if it's anything serious at all. All men, as they get on in years, are apt to get queer notions at times, especially about their health. I'll go right up and see him now, but I don't anticipate that we'll find there's the slightest cause for alarm."

For half an hour Henry Carleton sat alone in the firelight, in spite of all the doctor had said still anxious and disturbed. Then he rose quickly as he heard footsteps descending the stairs, and stood waiting, expectant and apprehensive. As the doctor entered the room, it was easy to see from the expression on his face that his news was certainly none of the best. Abruptly Henry Carleton stepped forward. "Is it serious?" he asked.

The doctor did not keep him in suspense. He nodded gravely. "Yes," he answered, "I suppose I should tell you so at once. It is," and then, seeing the unspoken question in the other's eyes, he added quickly, "No, I don't mean anything immediate, necessarily; but he's failed terribly since I saw him last. I suppose it's been all of six months now, at least, since I came out before; and probably to you, living with him and seeing him every day, the change has been so gradual that you haven't noticed it, but it's been going on steadily just the same, all the time. He's certainly failed — alarmingly."

Slowly Henry Carleton nodded. "I see," he said half-mechanically, then added, "Is it anything particular, Doctor, or just a general breaking up?"

"Just that," the doctor answered. "Just old age. It's the same story with all of us, after all. The machine is built to run about so long. Sometimes it wears out gradually; sometimes, as in Mr. Carleton's case, even at the allotted age, it seems almost as good as new; and those are the cases, where, when anything does go wrong, it's apt to go wrong very suddenly indeed, so that to every one the shock is proportionately greater, and just so much harder to bear."

Again Henry Carleton nodded. "Nothing that one can do, I suppose?" he asked, and the doctor shook his head. " No," he answered, " practically nothing; it's really his own fight. I'll leave some directions about medicine and diet, of course, and I rather think, on the whole, though it's probably a needless precaution, that I'll stay here with you for the night. You might fix me up a sofa in his room, if you don't mind; I think perhaps I should feel better satisfied to stay until morning, anyway. His heart isn't quite what I'd like it to be."

By nine o'clock Edward Carleton seemed to be in better spirits, and to be resting more comfortably, and neither Henry Carleton, nor, for that matter, Doctor Morrison himself, retired with any thought of an immediate turn for the worse. Henry Carleton, indeed, resigned himself to sleep with all the comfort that comes from a conscience serenely at peace with every one, and a knowledge that one's worldly affairs — deprecated but not despised — are going magnificently to one's advantage. Calmly enough he balanced his spiritual accounts with his Creator and his fellow-men, and found that with both his credit was good. Placidly he passed in review on matters more material, and there found, if such a thing could be, his credit better still; and then, as a good man should, dropped off to sleep with no disturbing or vexing thoughts to mar his rest.

Yet after all, the night was not destined to be a peaceful one, for somewhere in the long, silent spaces that lie between midnight and the dawn, the bell connecting Edward Carleton's room with his rang once, twice, thrice; insistent and shrill, piercing his dreams with a sudden foreboding of evil. In a moment he was up and across the hall, to find, in the dim light, the doctor, half-dressed, supporting the old man's figure, swaying as he strove to prop him against the pillows. Sharply the doctor spoke. "On the mantel," he cried, "my case. Quick, please. No, come here. I'll get it myself. Keep his head up — there — that way — so. Just a minute, now; just a minute —"

It was but the fraction of a minute, at the most, until he returned, but in the interval the old man's eyes had opened and had gazed at Henry Carleton with an expression of recognition. Instantly, too, he strove to speak, but in vain, and then, just as the doctor reached his side, his eyes closed, and his head dropped back among the pillows. Edward Carleton was dead.

It was seven o'clock the next morning when Doctor Morrison, tired and pale with the strain of his long, sleepless night, entered his office, to meet Helmar just coming down the stairs. "Old Mr. Carleton's gone, Franz," he said abruptly, "heart failure. He died early this morning."

Helmar glanced up quickly. "I'm very sorry indeed," he said, "but it's not a surprise. I remember when I saw him I didn't give him over six months, or a year, at the most. His heart action was none too good even then, and there were other things."

Doctor Morrison nodded, then looked at him with a rather curious expression. "Franz," he said, "you know your friend Jack Carleton?"

Helmar's eyes met his frankly. "I was just thinking of him," he said, "I'm afraid it will be a terrible shock. I think he scarcely realized that his father was failing at all. Poor old Mr. Carleton!

And what a difference it all makes. To think that Jack will come into his fortune now."

Again Doctor Morrison eyed him curiously. "Come into his fortune," he repeated, and again Helmar looked up quickly, struck by his tone.

"Why, yes," he answered, "why not? I always understood that Jack would have the estate on his father's death. There's been no change, has there? Jack hasn't been cut off in any way?"

Doctor Morrison shook his head. "No," he answered, "nothing like that, exactly; but suppose I have nothing, and give you all I have; that doesn't do you such a tremendous lot of good."

Helmar's expression sufficiently showed his astonishment. "You don't mean it!" he cried. "Why, that can't be so! I always understood from every one that Edward Carleton was a very rich man. Why, just look at his place, for one thing; it can't be so."

Doctor Morrison shrugged his shoulders. "It's the same old story," he said, "you know yourself how often it happens, and how surprised people are on a man's death to find how comparatively little he has. Sometimes, of course, you'll find it just reversed, and the man that's rated at fifty thousand dies worth half a million. But that's the exception, these days, and the other's the rule. For one man that scrapes and saves, there are a dozen who live on a big scale, spend their income to the last cent, and maybe draw on the principal, too. And Edward Carleton spent money very freely, I suppose."

Helmar looked entirely unconvinced. "Well, suppose he did," he answered, "admit that he did, even; for he did give a lot to charity and things like that; I know that for a fact. But even then — think of the different enterprises he was in in his day, and practically all big, successful ones. Oh, it can't be that he left nothing; it's an impossibility."

Doctor Morrison shook his head. "No, sir, it's true," he replied, "I'm not speculating about it; I know it positively, because I got it from Henry Carleton's own lips. He surely ought to know, if any one does, and he'd hardly care to publish the fact if it wasn't really so. He's a most remarkable man, Helmar. I've always admired him, but I don't think I ever really quite appreciated him before. Sometimes I seemed to find him a little self-centered, a little too sure of himself, if you know what I mean. But I know better now, for what he's done in his brother's case is really as fine a thing as you ever heard. It seems that the old gentleman had always managed his own affairs, but about a year ago he came to Henry and asked him to take charge of everything for him. I suppose he felt that he was getting a little out of touch with things, perhaps; anyway, whether he suspected it or not, the sequel proved that he'd managed to put matters off a little too long. He had some very unfortunate investments, and he'd looked out for lots of other people ahead of himself, and the long and short of it was that when the panic blew along, it simply wiped Edward Carleton off the map."

Helmar nodded grudgingly. "Well, on those facts, I can understand it, then," he replied. "But I always thought he was too conservative a man to get caught in anything like that. He had plenty of company, though."

"No doubt of that," Doctor Morrison assented, "and then what do you suppose Henry Carleton did? Straightened out what was left of the wreck as well as he could, told the old gentleman that everything was all right, and has kept the estate going ever since, letting him have whatever he wanted, right out of his own pocket, and without a word to any one that things were any different from what they always had been. He's even kept on paying Jack the allowance his father gave him, and that, too, after he and Jack had had another row, more serious than any that had gone before. And he'd have kept on like that, he told me, if the old gentleman had lived ten years instead of one. If that isn't doing one's duty, in the best sense of the word, I'd like to have you tell me what is."

For a moment, Helmar did not reply. To all that Doctor Morrison had said he had listened with the closest attention. "He told you all this himself, you say?" he queried at length.

At once the doctor felt the unspoken criticism in his tone. "And why not?" he retorted. "This has been a time of great strain for him, and we were together there for the rest of the night. At a time like that a man's tongue is loosened perhaps a little more than usual."

Helmar made no answer, either of denial or assent. Then, after a little while, "Does Jack know?" he asked.

"Not yet," the doctor answered. "There seemed nothing to be gained by telephoning. I told Henry Carleton I'd go up at once myself."

Helmar reached for his hat. "If you don't mind," he said, "let me go instead," and Doctor Morrison, spent and weary, readily enough nodded assent.

Carleton, as Helmar entered the door of his room at the Mayflower, turned with some surprise to greet his friend. "Why, hello, Franz," he cried. "What the devil brings you here?" Then noticing the look on Helmar's face, he added quickly, and in a very different tone, "What is it? Anything wrong?"

Helmar nodded. Between man and man, he was no believer in striving to break bad news gently. "It's your father, Jack," he said. "He died this morning. It was very sudden. Doctor Morrison was there. It was his heart. There was nothing that could be done. And he didn't suffer, Jack; and that means a great deal."

He stopped, making no empty protestations of sympathy. Carleton, turning on his heel, stepped quickly to the window, and stood, with his back to Helmar, gazing blankly out into the street. Presently he turned again; his eyes were moist; and his voice, when he spoke, was pitched low. "The poor old Governor," he said. "He was awfully good to me. I never thought — I wish now — I wish somehow I'd been different with him."

With the vast freemasonry of experience Helmar divined his thoughts. "I know, Jack," he said, "I know how I felt when my father died. I've known since, a hundred times, what sons and daughters might be to their parents, but somehow we're not. It's just the fact of being young, I suppose. We don't understand; we don't appreciate — until it's too late; and then we never can repay; only remember, I suppose, when we have children of our own, that we've got to make allowances, too —"

He broke off abruptly, and for a moment there was silence. Then, with evident constraint, he spoke again. "Doctor Morrison was coming up here himself, Jack," he said, "but I asked him to let me come instead. There was something I wanted to tell you especially — about the estate. Henry has told Doctor Morrison that in the panic your father lost about everything he had, so that practically there's nothing left. I wanted to tell you first —"

Carleton nodded, but the expression on his face showed no new emotion. "Thank you, Franz," he said, "I understand, and I appreciate; you've always been a good friend to me. But I don't care about the money; it isn't that; I only wish —"

In spite of himself his voice faltered and broke, and he again turned hastily away, while Helmar waited in silence, scarce knowing what to do or say. At length Carleton turned to him once more, speaking as one speaks only to a tried friend, his voice steady enough now, yet hardly sounding like his own. "Memory's a queer thing, Franz," he said. "Of all that I remember about my father, what do you suppose comes back to me now? Something that happened almost twenty years ago, when we used to spend our summers down at the shore. A little trivial thing, too, I suppose any one would say. I was just a youngster then — nine or ten, maybe — and we had two little sail-boats that were the apple of my eye. Poor enough craft I guess they were, looking back at them now, but no two cup defenders to-day could look to me as those two boats did then.

"I wasn't considered big enough to go out in them alone, but one Saturday afternoon my father promised me that if Henry, when he came down from town, would take one boat, I could take the other, and we could have a race. As long as I live, I'll never forget that morning. A thousand times I looked out to where the two boats lay moored; crazy with excitement; planning everything; the start, the course; looking at the wind;

right on edge — and somehow it never even occurred to me that Henry wouldn't want to go. I suppose I honestly couldn't imagine that any man, woman or child could possibly refuse a chance to sail a boat race.

" Well, Henry arrived, and you can imagine what Henry did. He hated me even then; I believe he'd always hated me, though of course I didn't realize it. Poor little rascal that I was, I'd never learned to think about hating any one. He heard me out — I can even remember how I grabbed hold of him as he was getting out of the station wagon, and how he shook me off, too — and then he looked at me with a queer kind of a smile that wasn't really a smile — I can imagine now just what fun it must have been for him — and said he was afraid there wasn't wind enough to go sailing. That was just to tantalize me — to see me argue and run out on the piazza and point to the ripples and the big American flag on the Island waving in the breeze — and then he had to turn away, and pretend to yawn, and say he didn't believe he cared to go, that anyway he was going over to the Country Club to play tennis. And then he went into the house to get ready, and left me out there on the piazza alone.

" I can laugh now, and shrug my shoulders at the whole thing, but then — why, it was black tragedy for me. I guess I was a pretty solemn-looking little chap, swallowing hard and trying not to cry, when my father found me there half an hour later. He'd been fishing all the morning, I remember, and I guess he was good and tired — he hadn't been well that summer, anyway — and he had a cigar in his mouth, and had his hand on the long piazza chair, just going to pull it into the shade, and settle down with a book and a paper for a nice, quiet afternoon. I told him, I remember, and he looked at his chair, and looked out on the water — the sun was strong, and pretty hot, and to tell the truth, though there was a little light air close to shore, about a quarter of a mile out to sea it was getting rather flat — and then he looked again at his chair, and then at me, and then he put down his book and his paper, and drew me up to him with one hand, and gave a smile — that was a smile

"'Come on, my old sailor,' he said 'and we'll see if we can't have a little boat race of our own.' Oh, how my heart jumped — the poor old Governor, I think my expression must pretty nearly have paid him — and then we toiled down over the rocks, with me hanging to his hand, the way a kid that really likes his father will; and out we went in the skiff, with me doing the rowing, splashing and jerking, and very proud, and then we got up sail, and drifted around the little course for a couple of hours — I can remember how hot it was — and of course I won. I didn't dream then that he let me, and perhaps, for him to hear me telling my mother about it over and over again at the supper table — perhaps —"

He stopped, unable to go on, and then, after a little pause, he added half-wistfully, in a voice that shook in spite of him, "It's queer, Helmar — isn't it?— how a little thing like that can stand out in your memory, and so many other things you utterly forget. It's just the — what is the word — just the *kindness* of it — damn it all —" and self-restraint at last giving way, he buried his face in his hands, and for the first time in many a long year, cried like a child.

Helmar for a moment stood still in troubled silence; then turned upon his heel, and softly left the room.

CHAPTER VII

A PARTING

> "For of fortunes sharpe adversite,
> The worst kind of infortune is this,—
> A man that hath been in prosperite,
> And it remember when it passed is."
>
> *Chaucer.*

MARJORY GRAHAM rose from her seat as Carleton entered the room, her hand outstretched in friendly greeting. "I'm glad you came out, Jack," she said, "it's seemed like a long time."

Carleton, as he seated himself, unconsciously kept his eyes fixed on the girl's face, thinking to himself that he had never seen her looking prettier, or more charming. He gave a nod of assent. "It *has* been a long time," he answered, "but you know how much has happened. I should have come before, but I thought I'd wait until things were settled first."

The girl looked at him, with sympathy in her glance. "I was so sorry, Jack," she said, "about your father."

He nodded again. "I know you were, Marjory," he answered, "you were always kind to him, and he valued your friendship, I know. He used to speak to me about you, many a time. And I never dreamed — he seemed so well — it's so hard for me to realize, even now, that we'll never see him again."

There followed a moment's silence. And then the girl spoke once more. "And I'm sorry, Jack, about all the rest, too."

His answering glance was grateful enough, yet somehow he appeared to wince a little at her words. "You needn't be, Marjory," he said, "because I don't deserve it. I've made a fool of myself. Your father told you everything, I suppose."

"Yes, Jack, he told me," she answered, "I don't think he liked doing it — he hates talking about other people's business — but he said you asked him to."

"Yes, I wanted him to," Carleton assented. "I wanted you to know all about it, before I came out. I thought I'd make a clean breast of things. I've paid my debts, thank Heaven, but I'm left practically without a cent; I'm no better than a beggar. And I'm living in a lodging-house, down-town. Quite a change, all right, from the Mayflower."

Her face clouded. "I won't bother you with sympathy, Jack," she said, "if you don't want me to; but I am awfully sorry, just the same; I've thought of you so many times. And Jack," she added, "I wish you'd promise me to think more about yourself now. You've been through such a lot, and really you don't look well at all. You're thin, and tired-looking, and different — somehow — every way."

Carleton nodded. What the inward change had been, he knew better than any one else. And outwardly, indeed, he did appear more careworn, more thoughtful, than he had ever done before. In his whole manner there was a new poise, and a new gravity as well. "Oh, I'm all right, thanks," he answered, "only when you get worried, and begin not to sleep, it makes a difference, you know.

Thank you, though, Marjory, for being sorry. I appreciate it more than I can say. But I didn't mean to bother you with all my troubles like this. I came out to tell you something different altogether, and I find it's awfully hard to begin."

Momentarily he paused. Intent on what he was saying, he had sat looking straight before him, never lifting his eyes to the girl's face. Had he done so, he could scarcely have failed to note the expression there, a look as if already she both knew and dreaded what it was that he wished to say, and had it been possible, would gladly have checked the words before he could give them utterance. But all absorbed in his desire to express himself as he wished, Carleton still sat gazing fixedly into the firelight, and after a pause, went on.

" I wonder how I can make you understand. Did you ever have something, Marjory, that you wanted to do very much; something that you were always on the point of doing, and yet somehow kept putting off from day to day, until at last something else happened that made it impossible ever to do it at all, and left you just saying over and over to yourself, 'Why didn't I? Why didn't I when I could?'"

The girl gave a nod of assent. "Yes, Jack," she answered, "I understand."

"Then you'll know what I mean," he continued, "by what I'm going to tell you now. It's only this, and I think you know what it is before I say it, even. I love you, Marjory; I always have loved you, even when you were only a little girl. That was the trouble all along, I suppose. I always thought of you as so young that I kept saying to myself that I oughtn't to bother you, that there would be plenty of time when you were older. And then — when you *were* older — I'd got started on a foolish way of living. I don't really know how I began — just seemed to drift into it somehow. And I didn't keep on because I enjoyed it — for I didn't — it was just the habit of it that gripped me so I couldn't seem to break away. And now that I've come to my senses again, Marjory — now that I can come to you, feeling that I've a right to tell you that I love you — why now it's too late. I've got to begin at the foot of the ladder; I can't ask you to marry me; but I want to know if you'll wait — let me show that I'm able to make good — give me another chance. That's all I ask, Marjory; all that I've a right to ask."

Slowly and unwillingly, her gaze met his, "Jack," she began, "you know the money would make no difference; I'd never think of that, of course. It isn't that —"

She hesitated, and stopped. Carleton's eyes sought hers with the look of a man who feels the whole world reel beneath him.

"Marjory," he cried, "do you mean you don't care — you don't love me?"

There was a moment's silence. And then the girl slowly shook her head. "No, Jack, I don't mean that. Of course I care. I've always cared. You must have known. Any time, from the day you graduated from college, up to a year ago, if you'd come to me and asked me to marry you, I'd have been the happiest girl you could find anywhere —"

For an instant she paused, and Carleton raised his eyes to hers, as if both knowing and dreading what her next words would be. "Well?" he asked.

"And then, Jack," she went on, even more slowly, as if the words cost her greater and greater effort, "you began to change. And caring isn't enough, Jack. For a girl really to love a man, she's got to respect him — and trust him. And you know how you've lived, Jack, for this last year. First I only heard things — you know how girls gossip among themselves — and each one has a brother, or a cousin or a sweetheart, who tells her things; so first I heard, and then, little by little, I could see for myself. I tried to think just as much of you as ever, Jack. I pretended to laugh at the stories they told. And then there came one night at a dance, when you weren't yourself at all — I hate to remember it even — and I knew then that things couldn't go on like that; that we'd have to come to some kind of an understanding. So I sent word by Franz Helmar, to ask you to come out to see me that Friday night. I'd made up my mind that we'd talk everything all over, between ourselves — about your drinking, and about that girl — I'd heard all people were saying; you can't keep those things from being known. And then, after I'd waited and waited for you all that evening, and finally given you up — then to come across you, the way we did, by accident, out motoring with her — with that common girl — I don't see how you could do it, Jack! I don't see how men can do things like that, and respect themselves; much less expect other people to respect them. And you, Jack, of all people — that was a terrible night for me. If I hadn't cared for you — if I didn't care for you, Jack — I wouldn't have minded; I wouldn't mind now. But for me to know that you'd been as devoted to me as you had — that every one talked about us as if we were really engaged — and then to know that all the time you'd been — oh, Jack, I had such faith in you! I thought you were different from other men. I don't see how you could."

Carleton had sat listening, his eyes fixed on the ground, wincing under her words. Gradually, as she spoke, a dull red flush had mounted to his very temples, and when she ended he at once made answer, speaking rapidly, as if the words were fairly wrung, by force, from his lips. "Don't, Marjory!" he cried. "For God's sake, don't! It's all true enough. I've been selfish, thoughtless, brutal; anything you please. I don't know why I did it. Men are queer things, that way, I guess. Because I loved you just as much, Marjory, all the time. I didn't know it then, but I do now. And it wasn't so bad, Marjory. It was foolishness, but that was all. The girl's none the worse for me. Don't condemn me for all our lives, because I've failed once. Let me make my fight. Let me show that I can be the kind of a man a girl can respect. And then it will be all right again. You'll marry me then, Marjory; say that you will."

Perhaps the straightforward vehemence of his speech helped him as nothing else could have done. The girl hesitated a moment before she answered; and finally, half-doubtfully, shook her head. "Ah, Jack," she said, "*if* you would. Then things would be all right again. But would you, Jack? *Can* you change your way of living, as you think you can? Suppose you did, for a time. Suppose we should marry, even. And then — if anything should happen. I'm different from most women, perhaps. But my husband has to be *mine,* the whole of him. And if you did — things like this — again, it would kill me, Jack. I couldn't bear the misery, and the shame. I want to trust you, Jack; I want to, more than anything in the world. But can I? Would you do as you say?"

Impulsively he rose, and walked over to the fireplace, leaning a hand on the mantel, and looking down into her face. "I can't blame you, Marjory," he cried, "if I would. And I won't waste time in words. But let me tell you what I'll do. I've two chances now. One here in town — that Henry's got for me — it's steady and sure, and pays fifteen hundred a year. And the other's to go ranching it out West, with a fellow I used to know in college. He always wanted me, and he'll take me now. There's a chance there, too; a chance to make money; a chance to get rich, even. I've been hesitating — I wanted to stay, to be near you — but I won't delay any longer. I'll go out there and take my chance. It means three years, anyway; maybe more. If I can come back then, with some prospect ahead of me — if I can come back then, and tell you, on my word of honor, that I've done nothing in all that time for which you need to feel ashamed — then things would be right again, wouldn't they? You'd marry me, Marjory, then."

Her face had clouded as he spoke. "Ah, Jack," she said, "it seems so hard to have you go away like that. I don't want you to; I'd rather have you here. And yet — I suppose it's best for both of us. I know you're right, Jack; that you ought to go, and make your fight. And I'll trust to what you tell me; and I'll wait — I'll wait three years, or twice three years."

His face had brightened with her words. He bent over her, and took her hand in his. "God bless you, Marjory," he said. "I'll go, and I'll fight as no man ever fought before."

For an instant longer he stood gazing down into her eyes; then turned abruptly. A moment later the portières had rustled behind him, and then were still.

CHAPTER VIII

TEMPTATION

"Why comes temptation, but for man to meet
And master and make crouch beneath his foot,
And so be pedestaled in triumph?"

Browning.

SLOWLY and thoughtfully Carleton ascended the stairs; reached his room; entered it; had even begun, with the mechanical force of habit, to fumble in his pockets for a match — and then, all at once, with a sudden shock of surprise, he awoke from his abstraction. The lamp on the center table was already lighted, though turned low, and from the shadow beyond, a dark figure rose, and came forward to meet him.

In an instant, he had reached out his hand; the next moment, the lamp light flooded the room; and then, as he recognized his visitor, there swept over his face a medley of emotions — amazement, displeasure, perhaps some other feeling as well. For an instant he stood motionless; then, frowning, again stepped forward, pitching his voice little louder than a whisper. "What the devil does this mean, Jeanne?" he asked.

The girl's lips were smiling; her eyes dancing with suppressed amusement. Plainly enough, she was in nowise disconcerted at her greeting, but instead met his glance with the expression of one who feels herself mistress of the situation. She too stepped forward, until only the width of the table separated them; then spoke, in the same low key, half, it seemed, in real precaution, half in mocking mimicry of his own anxious tone. "Aren't you glad to see me, Jack?" she whispered. "I thought you'd be so pleased."

Carleton's expression did not change, except that his frown deepened, and his mouth grew stern. "What are you thinking of?" he said again, and in the same tone as before. "Coming here! At this time of night! Are you crazy, Jeanne?"

Smiling still, the girl came closer, laying her hand appealingly on his arm, and looking up into his face with the innocent gaze of a child unjustly wronged. "Now, Jack —" she began.

Carleton, with a quick intake of his breath, stepped back, shaking off the slender hand. "Drop it, Jeanne," he said sharply. "Here —" he thrust the arm-chair toward her, "sit down, and tell me what all this means, and then, for God's sake, go away!"

With an amused shrug of her shoulders, the girl complied, seating herself leisurely and comfortably, as if she were far from being in a hurry to depart, and glanced up at him with a look charming and demure enough to have driven away the frown which still lingered on his brow. And then, as she made no move to speak, he broke the silence.

"How on earth," he asked, "did you get here?"

She smiled back at him, her eyes dancing with mischief. "Bribery," she answered. "The maid at the door said it was as much as her place was worth. I told her it was a matter of great importance — I really did it rather well, I think — and then I told her that no one would ever know and — persuaded her. And here I am."

"So I perceive," he observed dryly, and then, more gravely, "And now what is it, Jeanne? Be quick, please. It must be close to midnight. If any one found you here —"

The girl laughed, low and mockingly. "Why, Jack," she said, "how awfully moral we've grown. You never used to be so particular about appearances. Don't you remember —"

He held up a silencing hand. "I remember a great many things, Jeanne. We had our good times, and we enjoyed them, too. But they're all gone by for me, my dear. If you dance, you've got to pay the piper. That's the truest thing that ever was said. And I'm paying him now. You heard all about the smash, of course. And you know that I'm a poor man. My sporting days are over, for good and all."

The girl nodded. For the first time, the smile had left her face, and her tone, when she spoke, was as grave as his own. "I know all about it, Jack," she said, "it isn't the money I care about. I thought it was — once — but it wasn't; it was you. And you haven't sent me word now for so long. And I wrote you, and you never answered. And then — I was lonesome, and so — I came."

He looked back at her steadily. "I didn't put things quite right, Jeanne," he said, "I didn't mean that it was wholly because I didn't have money any more. That is part of it, I guess, but there's more to it than just that. I'm sorry for a lot of foolish things I've done, and I mean to quit them."

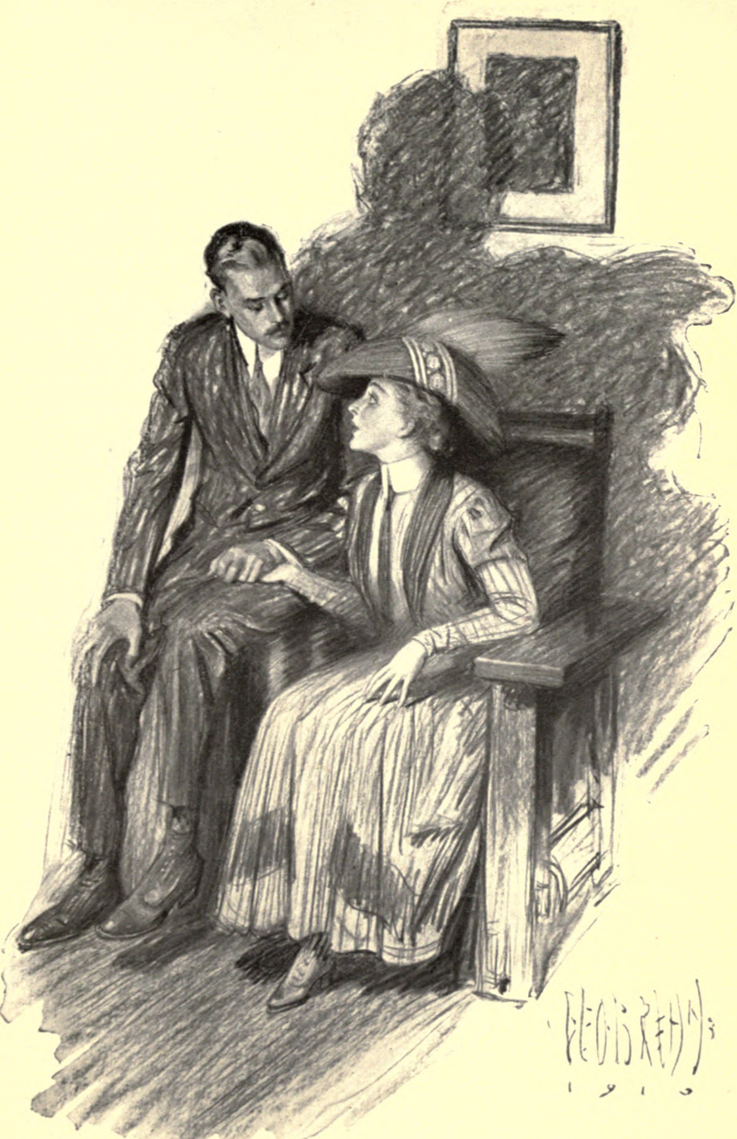
She raised her eyebrows at the words, and a new expression came over her face. "Oh," she said. "I see. So going around with me was foolish, was it? That's strange. You didn't seem to think so, when you were doing it, Jack."

If she had expected to hear him withdraw his words, she was disappointed. "You don't understand me, Jeanne," he said, "there was no question about my enjoying it. I didn't mean that. I enjoyed it too much — that was all. But that doesn't alter the fact that it was foolishness for both of us. It was all my fault. It was only because I got used to seeing you around the place, out at The Birches, and you were so pretty, and so nice, that I wasn't strong enough to resist temptation. And we had some great old times together. Don't think I've turned preacher all at once, because I haven't. We had some bully times, and I shall always remember them. But I was injuring you, Jeanne, and I was injuring myself, too. We were going ahead with something that could turn out only one way — we were playing the devil's pet game. And I thank God we pulled up in time."

The girl stiffled a little yawn; then smiled up at him more brightly than before, motioning, as she did so, to the arm of the chair. "You *have* turned preacher, Jack," she said. "Don't do it any more, please; it's so stupid. And don't stand, either. There's lots of room."

He shook his head. There came into her eyes a gleam of something other than mirth, and as she spoke, she raised her voice a trifle. "Sit down, Jack," she said again.

Carleton threw an anxious glance over his shoulder, and then, unwillingly enough, drew up to the table the only other chair in the room. Again the gleam flashed, far back in her eyes, and once more she tapped on the arm of the chair. "Sit here,"


GEO BREHM
1910

“Jack,” she murmured, “have I changed?”—Page 145

she said imperiously, and heedful, not of the words, but of the tone, he obeyed.

At once her slender hand had stolen into his. "Look at me, Jack," she commanded, and reluctantly enough he gazed down into the face that in the past had fascinated him beyond his strength. As if in a silent trial of their wills, her eyes held his, "Jack," she murmured, "have I changed?"

Carleton's teeth came together sharply; unconsciously the hand that held hers tightened so that she gave a little cry of pain, before it again relaxed. "No," he muttered hoarsely, "only you're prettier than ever, Jeanne."

Her other hand crept upward until it rested on his shoulder; still her eyes were fixed on his, and still he did not look away. And then, "Ah, Jack," she whispered, "you foolish boy! What did you think, anyway? That I thought you'd marry me? Of course I didn't. I wanted a good time too. 'Only end one way,' Jack. Of course. That was the way I *wanted* it to end. That's why I came here to-night, Jack, dear —"

At last he had wrenched his eyes free from her gaze. "Don't Jeanne!" he cried. "Don't —" but she clung the closer to him.

"Jack," she said, as though not understanding, "Jack, what's changed you? Don't you want me?" and then, her whole tone altering in one instant's flash, "There's some one else, then," she cried. "You were never like this before. Isn't there, Jack? Isn't there?"

Once more he met her glance. "Yes, Jeanne," he said, very low, "there is."

On the instant, her eyes flamed; instinctively she drew back, and Carleton, freed from her grasp, started to his feet. She rose also, quivering from head to foot.

"It's that Graham girl!" she cried. "That doll! Don't do it, Jack! Don't marry her! She'd never love you the way I would. Don't do it, Jack! We can have such a good time. I've got some money; we can get more. We can go abroad together. You've made me love you, Jack; you can't cast me off now. It isn't fair. I'm not asking much. You can have me Jack, the whole of me — as long as you want me — and then, when you're tired of me, you can leave me, and go your way. Jack, please —"

She stood there, breathing quick and hard, and gazing at him with such a look on her face that half against his will, he stepped forward, and took her hand in his. "Jeanne," he said, "God knows I'm sorry. I never meant things to end like this; I never thought you really cared. But I can't do what you say. It *is* Marjory Graham; I've asked her to marry me, and I've promised her, this very night, to live straight from now on. Don't think it's easy for me, dear; it isn't. Don't think I don't appreciate — everything. But we wouldn't be happy, Jeanne — either of us. It wouldn't be right; it wouldn't be square; we'd both regret — we mustn't do it, Jeanne. I'm sorry, from the bottom of my heart, if I've hurt you; but I never meant it. You must go your way, Jeanne; and I must go mine."

Even as he spoke, his heart smote him. The girl stood, her eyes cast down, her breast heaving — "My way," she muttered, half under her breath. "My way; oh, God!" and then, slowly and uncertainly, she lifted her eyes to his and Carleton saw that they were filled with tears. For the first time she seemed to realize her dismissal, and to accept it. "Very well," she said wearily, "I'll go," and then, after a pause, "kiss me, Jack."

Carleton bent and kissed her; then, almost roughly, released her, and as she turned away, stood silent, with averted face, not daring to trust himself to look.

The silence deepened. Then, very softly, the door closed. He raised his eyes. He was alone in the room. Like a man physically spent, he threw himself down into the arm-chair, and buried his face in his hands.

CHAPTER IX

THREE YEARS LATER

"Ay me, how many perils do enfold the righteous man!"
Spenser.

ACROSS the rampart of his desk Henry Carleton gazed regretfully at his visitor; then once again shook his head. "I'm sorry, Van Socum," he said, "I hate to refuse such a call, and I hate to refuse you of all men. A year ago I should have felt differently, but now as you know, we're in the midst of hard times, and first and last, one has to meet so many demands. I'm afraid I shall really have to ask you to excuse me. But I'm sorry, though; extremely sorry; I only wish I felt able to respond. Perhaps some time a little later —"

Slowly the Reverend William Van Socum nodded his head. From his general appearance — his bland, plump, rosy face; his stout, well-fed little body; his ultra correct ministerial garb — one would scarcely have divined his really unusual talents. For the Reverend William Van Socum was the man whose remarkable ability to assist his church in a certain deprecated, but much needed and excessively practical department of its activities, had gained for him among his clerical associates the title, bestowed in ungrudging admiration, of "The Painless Separator."

And now, while the gentle inclination of his head was meant to convey the most sympathetic understanding, at the same time he made no move to rise, but on the contrary kept his seat, and unflinchingly returned Henry Carleton's gaze. For Van Socum's pride was touched. He had made up his mind, before entering the great man's office, that its doors should not again be closed behind him until in the neat little space opposite Henry Carleton's name he had seen inserted the pleasantly round sum of five hundred dollars. And now to all appearances he had met a foeman worthy of his steel — of his brass, possibly some envious detractor might have preferred to say — a man every whit as smooth and polished as himself, a man who was both ready and able to defend his little garrison of beleagured dollars with a skill of fence and a completeness of repulse which could not but arouse Van Socum's somewhat unwilling admiration. Accustomed to success as he had become, defeat seemed now well-nigh assured. Whimsically he thought of the ancient problem of the irresistible force and its contact with the immovable body, and as an afterthought he added grudgingly to himself, "This man's wasted in business; he ought to be one of us."

But these, of course, were thoughts merely. Outwardly, the reverend gentleman gave no sign that he dreaded, or even expected, a refusal. His little oily professional smile was as winning and as confident as ever. Yet he realized that he was dealing with a busy man, and prudently determined, while the chance yet remained to him, to play his last card without delay.

"I understand, my dear Mr. Carleton," he exclaimed, "I perfectly understand. For a man like yourself, a man of your standing in the community, none can realize better than I what a tax these constant demands must be, on patience and on pocketbook as well." He paused for just the veriest instant, inwardly to smack his lips; he loved a well-turned phrase, above all if it had about it a flavor of alliteration, and "On patience and on pocketbook as well" struck him as distinctly good. Then, with a swift return to business methods,

"But I did feel, Mr. Carleton, that this time you would favor us. The project of the new altar seems to have made a wide appeal to all those most interested in the beautifying of our beloved church, and example — the example, let us say, of a man of your type, Mr. Carleton — does mean so much to some of the weaker brethren. Not every one, perhaps, realizes this, but I myself know it to be a matter of the greatest consequence, and it was this same power of example that I had in mind when I arranged to have the preliminary list made public to-morrow in six of the leading dailies. And for my part, I can see nothing out of the way in such a proceeding. The press and the pulpit — or rather, let us say, the pulpit and the press — why should they not proceed together hand in hand, so that all things, spiritual and secular, may at last work together for good. That, at least, is my conception of it. And the papers have been very kind. Almost invariably, I think I may say. To a laborer in the vineyard, to one who bears the burden and heat of the day, it is gratifying — I must confess it — very gratifying indeed."

He spoke but the truth, as Henry Carleton well knew. The Reverend William Van Socum had the reputation of being the greatest ecclesiastical advertiser in the city. Just how he did it, none but himself seemed to know, yet stony-hearted editors and impervious reporters were but as wax in his hands. "The pulpit and the press" was not simply another of his favorite catch-words; it meant something substantial as well. Hand in hand they traveled, in very truth, and it was the bland and smiling Van Socum who managed to unite them in this touching amity.

"Yes," he said reminiscently, "six of the leading dailies. And good position in all of them, too. It's a splendid thing for us. So far the Honorable Samuel Rogers has made the largest individual subscription — two hundred and fifty dollars — and his name at the head of the list will of course mean a great deal. We consider that he has acted very handsomely. But —" the smile again appeared, like the sun from behind the clouds, deprecating, wistful, with just a hint of gentle reproach, and oily enough to have turned an ocean into calm —" but above that of Mr. Rogers we had hoped to have one other name, one other name still more widely and — if you will pardon me — still more favorably known than even that of Mr. Rogers himself."

Henry Carleton looked, as he felt, a trifle uncomfortable. "I deplore," he said, a little stiffly, "any publicity in such matters. The right hand, and the left, Van Socum, you know."

Occasionally an expert boxer, for some reason of his own, will leave himself unguarded, purposely to invite a blow. With joy the Reverend William Van Socum foresaw the beginning of the end. "True! true!" he cried, "as far as the giver is concerned. But for the effect on others, Mr. Carleton. That is where you are in error. Let your light so shine! That is the injunction which covers the case. The shining light, Mr. Carleton! The shining light!"

The blow sped home. Henry Carleton meekly inclined his head, as it seemed, a willing sacrifice. "I deplore publicity —" he again began, but his tone was feebler by far; and then he added, metaphorically throwing up the sponge, "in six papers, did you say?"

Van Socum bore his honors modestly. "Six," he answered, again producing the subscription book from his pocket, "six; and excellent position in all. And of course our own paper, *The Flaming Torch,* which in itself has a circulation by no means contemptible. Let me see. Five hundred, Mr. Carleton? A thousand, perhaps, would be almost too large a sum."

Inwardly Henry Carleton was returning the compliment the Reverend Doctor had just paid to him. "This fellow," he thought, "is thrown away on the church. I could use a man like him to excellent advantage." "Yes," he answered, "five hundred, I think. I shouldn't wish to be criticized on the score of ostentation."

The victor drew out his pencil; then, almost in the act of writing, paused, as if suddenly recalling something to mind.

"By the way, Mr. Carleton," he asked, "did some one tell me the other day that your nephew had returned from the West?"

Henry Carleton's face was expressionless. "Yes," he answered, "he is back. He has been in town several days."

Van Socum nodded amiably. "How very pleasant!" he said smoothly. "He is — improved — I trust?"

A slight frown seemed to hover about the banker's brow. He appeared to place a curb on his speech. "Greatly, thank you," he answered briefly.

The clerical smile again burst into bloom. "So glad; so very glad to hear it," he murmured; then continued brightly, "but I felt sure that it would be so. There was such a field for it. When he left us, one might almost have dared to uproot the tares without feeling that the wheat would be in danger. So glad — so very glad."

He paused a moment; then, as if tentatively feeling his way toward a possible germ for a sermon, he moralized, "Three years! How swiftly time passes us by! What changes it brings to us all! To you — to me — to your nephew —" He stopped abruptly, his ideas swinging suddenly into another channel, "And speaking of the passage of time, Mr. Carleton, what a change it has brought in your daughter, Rose! I remember her as a charming child, and behold, I met her the other afternoon at a little tea — why, Mr. Carleton, I assure you I could scarcely believe my eyes. A young lady — grown-up, self-possessed, a half-dozen young men around her. Why, I was amazed. The passage of time —"

He half paused; perhaps, if the truth were told, Henry Carleton half broke in upon him. "Yes," the banker agreed, "it passes, as you say. And it's valuable, Van Socum. We can't afford to waste it, any of us."

The minister smiled — forgivingly — and bending over his book, he wrote — yet did not at once vanish. Of a man so comfortably portly, of a plumpness so suggestive of a certain counterpart in the animal creation, perhaps that could hardly have been expected. Instead he rose slowly, beaming on his conquered antagonist. "By their fruits —" he murmured.

Henry Carleton nodded, handing the check across the desk. "Exactly," he said dryly. "By the way, Van Socum, I heard a capital story the other day. It was told — this time — about a man high up in municipal office. 'Is that fellow Blank,' asked some one who didn't know just what position he really occupied, 'is that fellow Blank a politician — or just a *common thief?*' Good, wasn't it?"

The Reverend William Van Socum laughed heartily. "Oh, capital," he cried, and then, casually, he added, "you say that was told about a politician?"

Henry Carleton met his glance. "Yes," he answered, "that time — it was told about a politician. Well, good-by, Van Socum; call again. Always glad to see you, you know, at any time. Good-by."

Half way to the door Van Socum turned. "Oh, by the way, Mr. Carleton," he said, "are any of these rumors that I hear true, by any chance? Are you going to give your friends an opportunity in the near future to see you reaping still further and still higher honors? Or is it merely gossip? For my part, I most sincerely hope that it's all true."

Henry Carleton's expression and tone were alike inscrutable. "Thank you very much, I'm sure," he returned, "but really I'm not at liberty to talk just now."

Van Socum nodded. "I perfectly understand," he answered. "Well, in any event I shall hope. And don't forget, Mr. Carleton, the shining light. It's most important. Good-by," and a little hastily he passed from the room, with a certain satisfied feeling that verbal honors were at least easy, and that from the field of more practical warfare he had again returned a triumphant victor.

Left alone, Henry Carleton, smiling a little to himself, once more leaned comfortably back in his chair. As he sat there, the waning sunlight, slanting through the tall window, fell pleasantly upon him, lighting up the dark, black-bearded face, with the full red lips, and the keen and scrutinizing eyes. A noticeable man, in almost any company, he would have been, and justly so as well. Doing many things, he did them all with skill. And still, in spite of the activities in which he was actually engaged, his friends were wont to talk of the many other things he might have done — living his life over for him in retrospect, as people will — and it was significant of his many-sidedness to note the different views which different people held of him. Some said that the bar had been robbed of a great lawyer, others that the universities had lost a great teacher and instructor of youth, others still, like Mr. Van Socum, that the church alone should rightfully have claimed his great talents. No one, perhaps, had ever suggested that the stage had lost a great actor.

And now, not satisfied with the active benevolence that he had just displayed, Henry Carleton was passively showing the same praiseworthy spirit which actuated his every deed and word. His day's work was done. It was ten minutes after five, and there seemed to be no possible reason why he should longer wait for the young man with whom he had made an appointment at five o'clock sharp. Adding to the fact that the young man was late, the further information that Henry Carleton felt tolerably sure he was coming to ask some sort of favor of him, we behold the heights to which it is possible for a man to rise.

Even patience, however, has its definite limits, and at a quarter past five Henry Carleton snapped his watch with a click, and had one hand already outstretched to close the top of his desk, when the clerk knocked, and opened the door far enough to announce Mr. Vaughan. Henry Carleton nodded, sighed, again leaned back in his chair, and relinquished the idea of getting the five-thirty home.

A moment later Arthur Vaughan entered the office with the rather breathless haste of the man who is thoroughly aware that to keep a great financier waiting for a quarter of an hour is an offense not lightly to be condoned. Indeed, about his whole manner, in spite of his thirty years, there was still something boyish and deprecating, the air of a man who is perhaps too modest, too slow to assert himself, yet who, if these be faults, is perhaps all the more likable for possessing them.

He came quickly forward. "I'm awfully sorry, Mr. Carleton," he began, "I know I'm late; but really I couldn't help it."

There may have been something a little less cordial than usual in the manner in which Henry Carleton shook the young man's proffered hand. Yet his voice, when he answered, was politeness itself. Early in life he had made it his invariable rule to treat every man who had once crossed the threshold of his office with complete and unvarying courtesy, until he had found out exactly what the visitor's business might be. After that, there was of course room for wider discretion. And so now, "Don't mention it," he said; "a trifle late, perhaps, but never mind. And what may I be able to do for you, Mr. Vaughan?"

Once seated, Vaughan appeared to be even more ill at ease than before. His eyes were fixed on the floor. His hat revolved aimlessly and sheepishly enough between his nervous fingers. "Why," he began, "why, the fact is, Mr. Carleton — you see what I wanted to tell you about — you see — " and then he came to a full and embarrassed stop.

Henry Carleton, through a long and varied experience, was nothing if not a shrewd reader of men. The same awkward hesitation, the same nervousness, the same half-cringing expression; he had seen them all displayed many times before by men who had sat there in the inner office in the selfsame seat which Vaughan was occupying now. And nine times out of ten it all meant but one thing. In the brief pause analysis and deduction in his mind were practically one. Vaughan's manner showed embarrassment. Vaughan was a would-be literary man. All would-be literary men, in greater or less degree, were poor. Vaughan, presuming on a rather slight acquaintanceship, had come to borrow money. The whole matter was painfully plain.

And then, even at the very instant when Henry Carleton had sorrowfully, but with philosophy, arrived at this inevitable conclusion, Vaughan, drawing a long breath, at last found his tongue. "Why," he said, speaking with a seeming boldness and hardihood which in reality were but the result of the most extreme embarrassment, "it's like this, Mr. Carleton; I want to marry Rose."

The proverbial bombshell, exploding at Henry Carleton's feet, could hardly have made the same havoc with his body that Vaughan's few words managed to create in his mind. And yet, to his credit be it said, his habitual self-control now stood him in such stead that after the one first uncontrollable glance of sheer surprise, he at once contrived to conceal not only his amazement, but as well any other feeling that might have been agitating his soul. And in another moment, indeed, he had even successfully achieved a very fair imitation of a jocular smile. "Rose," he echoed, "my daughter Rose! Why, you're joking with me, my dear fellow. She's not eighteen yet. She's a child."

Vaughan, now that the worst was over, did not seem to be properly disconcerted at the reply. "Oh, I know she's quite young," he answered readily enough, " but that doesn't seem to make any particular difference. We're both prepared for a long engagement. I'm not well off, in the least. It's bound to be some time before I could dream of providing for her in any proper way at all. But I love her, Mr. Carleton — as much, I think, as any man could — and she loves me, and we think, after all, that's the main thing. The other details we'll work out somehow, I guess."

Henry Carleton had now perfectly regained his self-possession. He gazed at the young man with benevolence in his eye. " Yes, yes," he assented, a little dreamily, " love, of course; that's the great essential. With that I thoroughly agree. And yet, while with me Rose's wishes are the first consideration — no, rather I should say the only consideration — still, as I understand you to say yourself, it must equally be a point of proper pride with every man to know that he is earning an honest living, amply sufficient for all future needs. I take it that you would hardly quarrel with that, Mr. Vaughan?"

To Vaughan it appeared that he was progressing famously. "No, indeed," he cried readily enough, "I should say not. That's the first thing to consider, of course. But I think I'm going to be able to solve that difficulty in a short time now. I think I'm fairly on my way to a little luck at last. You know, of course, Mr. Carleton, in any of the arts it isn't exactly the same proposition for a man as if he'd chosen a business career. There, if he gets a start, and then sticks to his job, and shows any kind of ability at all, after a while he's almost certain to get somewhere or other. But with any of the arts — that's the chance a man takes when he turns his back on the solid, steady kind of things — you can work along for a devil of a while, putting in the very best that's in you, too, and yet you always stand a good chance of not arriving at all, or, if you do, perhaps not till two or three hundred years after you're dead. And of course, while even that, in a sense, is very gratifying, still it's hardly practical. Dining late, but in select company, in Landor's phrase, is all very well, if you can afford it, but the majority of us poor fellows have to dine in the middle of the day. The other thing's a luxury we can't afford."

Henry Carleton nodded. "Quite so, quite so," he said, "I know something of that myself. I thoroughly appreciate all the difficulties in the way of combining devotion to art with a large income. It's one of the least gratifying things about our life of the present day. And still, too, each year I believe the artist is coming more and more fully into his own. But you were going to say — about your immediate prospects —"

Vaughan flushed a little. "I didn't mean to ramble on into so long a preface," he said, "I'm afraid it was nothing but a desire to excuse myself, anyway. However, here's where I think I really have a chance at last. I've written a book — a novel — and it's in the hands of Small and White now. Of course I needn't tell you what it would mean to have their imprint on a book — it would be half the battle to start with. And I've been able to get a little information in a roundabout way, so that I have some idea of what's happening. I know the book has got by the preliminary stages, anyway; I know that they're really considering it seriously, and that is something in its favor. But I'm hoping for more than that; I'm hoping that they will really accept it, and launch it in good style; and if they do, why — I know of course you'll think I'm conceited and over-fond of myself to say such a thing — but, with all sincerity, Mr. Carleton, I think the book would be a success; I think it makes an approach to something like literary merit. Oh, if I could once get my start — get some pretext for thinking that I had a right to put more and more time into writing, and less and less into what is really only the merest hack work, that has to be done so hastily and superficially that in the end it would kill any man's style — then I'd work as nobody ever worked before — I'd kill myself to learn to write as I want to write —"

He broke off suddenly, his hands clenched, his face ablaze with the passion of the artist who craves to express in concrete form the dreams and visions that float athwart his brain. Henry Carleton sat regarding him narrowly, his face expressionless, but when he spoke, his tone could hardly have been kinder or more sympathetic.

"Yes, yes, I understand your feeling exactly," he said, "and your ambition is a most worthy one. I'm delighted to hear about the book, and if you will allow me to do so, I should be very happy to try to help a little. There are one or two ways that occur to me offhand — understand me, of course,— ways perfectly legitimate and businesslike in every particular, in which I think a word from me with Small and White might at least do no harm. Won't you try to get me a list of the men who do their reading for them? We'll leave no stone unturned that properly may be turned to give your effort a fair show. Rose's happiness is my happiness, and to see you in a position when you may rightfully pay your addresses to her — that I most earnestly desire. And in the meantime, you must come out to The Birches — let me see — come out to-morrow night, won't you, and dine with us? Jack's coming, and another man, I think. I shall be delighted to have you join us, and I think, after what you have told me, I may safely answer for Rose."

He rose as he finished speaking, extending his hand in farewell. Vaughan, rising also, could only stammer his thanks. "You're too kind, altogether, Mr. Carleton," he managed to say. "I know how any word from you would meet with the most respectful consideration from Small and White. It would help immensely. And as for to-morrow night, nothing could please me more. And how is Jack? I haven't seen him since he got back from the West."

"Jack is greatly improved, I think," Henry Carleton answered, as it seemed to Vaughan, a trifle shortly, "however, you'll see him to-morrow night, and can judge for yourself."

Vaughan nodded. "I'm glad to hear it," he said. "I got the impression from his letters that he was doing far better in every way, and I'm awfully glad if it's so. Well, I must go, Mr. Carleton. You've been very kind to take everything the way you have. I know, of course, in one way, at least, what a disappointment this must be for you. I don't care such a lot myself. Family trees and all that never meant such a great deal to me, and money bags even less, but for Rose's sake, why, I wish I were the wealthiest man in the world, and the most aristocratic; she ought to have everything that a girl can have. So you're awfully good not to make a row."

Again Henry Carleton smiled. "Nonsense," he said heartily, "those things make no difference with me, either. You've chosen a great career, and all we must do now is to make success assured, so that you can come to me as I know you want to come, saying, 'Mr. Carleton, I'm earning a fair living; I can keep your daughter from want; I wish to marry her.' That's the way you'll be coming some day, and you'll find no one more ready to congratulate you than I. Good-by again; good-by."

As Vaughan left the office, Carleton slowly reseated himself. "Strange," he murmured, "a prospective son-in-law in young Vaughan, and I never even dreamed of it. Very prospective, too; that's one comfort; and he seems actually to believe he may succeed in a literary career. Odd, what a time youth is for such dreams. He seems rather an inoffensive young man, at least; plastic, I should imagine, and rather easy to influence, if one only goes about it in the right way. That, I judge, is his weak point; that, and too great a tendency to confide in others. Due, I suppose, to the lack of a sound business training." He sat silently for some moments, then repeated thoughtfully, "The lack of a sound business training," and reached for the telephone. And then, a moment later, "Is Mr. Cummings in? Oh, it's you, is it, Jim? Want to run over for a moment? Important? Yes, I should call it so. Thank you. Good-by," and restoring the receiver to its hook, he gave himself up to earnest thought.

CHAPTER X

THE BIRCHES AGAIN

> "The ancient grudge I bear him."
>
> *Shakespeare.*

OPPOSITE the gateway of the Eversley train, the three men stood grouped together, with growing impatience awaiting Jack Carleton's arrival. The gilded hands of the big clock, embedded in the solid masonry of the station wall, now pointed to three minutes of five; the Eversley "flyer" left at five precisely; and the long train was filling more rapidly each instant. Henry Carleton's tone plainly enough showed his displeasure. "Whatever else it may have done for him," he observed, "I can't see that a residence in Montana has improved Jack's habits of punctuality. Perhaps, Vaughan, you wouldn't mind waiting here for him and letting us go ahead and make sure of getting seats. What do you say, Cummings?"

Cummings nodded with alacrity. He was a man between thirty and thirty-five, tall and heavily built. His face, while rather of the bulldog type, yet to the eye of the careful observer seemed to disclose a certain weakness under the outward show of strength. His complexion was of a vivid red, plentifully ornamented with those souvenirs which come at length as badges of distinction to those who have had the perseverance to drink hard and steadily over a long enough term of years. His hair was very black and very curly; his tie perfectly matched his complexion; and his clothes, though of excellent make and cut, yet seemed a little obtrusive as well, as if the effort at gentility had been somehow overdone. Possibly several small trifles in his apparel — the conspicuously high polish on his shoes, the violet-bordered corner of the immaculate handkerchief, just visible above the breast pocket of his coat, the pair of very new tan gloves that he carried in his left hand — all proclaimed something of the inner man; a man not lacking in a certain force and aggressiveness, even in a kind of blustering self-assertion and desire for recognition, yet one who still realized with vague discomfort, that there was something wrong about him. Jim Cummings was far from being a fool. He was well-versed in the ways of the city; had " been around," had " seen life;" was altogether a pretty shrewd and capable young man. And yet — spite of all — there was still a mysterious something somewhere lacking. To save his soul, he could not have told what it was. Perhaps Henry Carleton could.

"What do I say?" he echoed. "Sure, Mr. Carleton; suit me fine. Just as cheap to sit down as to stand, you know. Sure, let's get along."

In thus voicing his delight, it chanced that he spoke the truth, as sometimes, indeed, he was wont to do. Merely to be seen alone with Henry Carleton, in what would doubtless have been his phrase, " meant a lot " to him. And to have an hour's ride with this versatile man of affairs, who had made a great name for himself in " straight " business, in the stock market, and in politics; who was possessed of " inside information "; who, if he chose, could give a friend a " straight tip "; and who had now been kind enough again to ask him out to spend the night, as on two or three memorable occasions he had done before; why, this was a chance that might well " mean a lot " to him in more senses than one.

Arthur Vaughan, no great admirer of Cummings, appeared, as indeed he was, equally well pleased at Henry Carleton's words. " Yes, indeed," he assented cordially, " don't run the risk of missing a seat, Mr. Carleton. I remember Jack's habits of old. You go right along, and I'll wait here for him."

Forthwith the two men took their departure, and Vaughan, waiting until only a scant half minute remained, was just on the point of leaving his post, when he espied Carleton threading his way hastily through the crowd. With only the briefest of greetings, they swung aboard the rear car, by good fortune found the one remaining vacant seat, and then Vaughan turned and slowly surveyed his friend from head to foot. At once he gave a quick smile of satisfaction. " Well, Jack," he said, " you *are* looking fit. I don't think you ever looked better in your life."

" Oh, pretty fair, thanks," Carleton answered, but his appearance, indeed, far more than bore out his words. He had regained and increased the physical vigor of his college days. He was broader, thicker, more solidly built, with an impression of reserve strength which he had lacked before. Nor did the change stop there. In face and feature, in his manner, in his whole bearing, there had come a change, and a change, too, in every way for the better. In his expression, the old uncertainty of purpose had given place to a look of determined resolve; in his manner there was a new alertness, a new interest; from his eyes and mouth a certain indescribable something had vanished, leaving them pleasantly frank and wholesome.

With a pleased laugh, Vaughan looked down at his friend's big brown hand, and placed his own, white and slender, beside it. "I guess," he said, "if it came to a fight, Jack, you could probably manage to lick me."

Carleton smiled, and with equal interest returned Vaughan's gaze. To him, Vaughan appeared scarcely to have changed at all. About him there was something of the man who is given to habitual overwork, yet otherwise, in his rather delicate way, he looked healthy and vigorous, and his face itself was still as pleasant and as kindly as of old. Carleton shook his head. "I don't think there will be any fight, Arthur," he said, "my fighting days are over. I've learned that much since I went away. I've come to believe that they don't pay — fights of any kind."

Vaughan nodded, quick to take his meaning. "Good," he answered, "I'm mighty glad to hear it, Jack."

Carleton's glance had been roaming up and down the aisle. "By the way," he said, "where's the rest of our merry party? Where's my respected uncle? And wasn't there somebody else he was going to bring out with him?"

Vaughan's eyes searched the car in vain. "I guess Mr. Carleton's up ahead," he returned, "probably in the smoker with Cummings."

Jack Carleton frowned. "Cummings?" he queried, "which Cummings? Jim?"

"Yes, Jim," Vaughan assented, "why? Know him?"

Carleton nodded. "Yes, I know him, all right." From his tone it would have been possible to draw the inference that his opinion of Cummings was scarcely favorable. But when, after a pause, he turned again to his friend, it was not of Cummings, but of Henry Carleton that he spoke. "And how's Henry been standing it?" he asked. "I've hardly heard anything, you see, for practically three years now. I'm away behind the times."

"Why," Vaughan answered, "he's a bigger man than ever, Jack. I guess I'm pretty well posted on him. Being on the paper, you know, you pick up a lot. He's a power on the Street now, and he's been making big strides in politics, besides. Some folks think he's right in line for the vacancy in the United States senatorship. And I'm not sure but what it's so, too. Then he's doing more for charity now than he used to. He gave five thousand at one crack the other day to something or other — a musical conservatory, I think it was. And he does a lot here at Eversley. The people out this way think he's just about right. Gave a thousand last month to the Eversley library, they say. Oh, I tell you it's good to see a man on the crest of the wave who still has an eye for the poor devils down in the hollow;" he paused for a moment, then added, with a smile, "of whom I have the honor to be one, Jack. You know I haven't made more than a million out of reporting. It's funny, but journalists don't seem to get appreciated in the salary line. But then, I oughtn't to complain. I've made a living, and kept out of debt, and if I hadn't had the folks down home to look after, I might have had a little put by, too. I'm not discouraged, either. I still consider it a privilege to be alive, and not to be kicked.

"But I was going to tell you about Mr. Carleton, and what he's going to do for me. I've written a novel that I'm trying to get published, and he's going to help me. I don't mean, of course, that such things don't go strictly on their merits, but still, even then, a friend at court doesn't do any harm. I've seen a lot of it, or I wouldn't talk that way. There's an inside story, I've come to believe, and an inside track, in everything, even in art, where of all places there shouldn't be. Not always, of course, but, I believe, oftener than you'd think.

And Mr. Carleton's surprisingly well known, everywhere. I've been amazed at it. I can't for the life of me see how he manages to get the time for all his different interests, but he does it somehow, and what's more remarkable still, he contrives to do everything well. His last bit of literary criticism in *Cosmopolis* was really excellently done. It's been well spoken of everywhere. So now that he's going to turn to and help, I'm immensely encouraged."

For a moment or two Carleton sat silent, as if perplexed. Then, "But why on earth," he asked, "is Henry taking all this sudden interest in *you?*"

With a laugh of enjoyment, Vaughan leaned forward. "I knew you'd ask that, Jack," he said triumphantly. "That's what I was leading up to. He's interested in me because — there's a very good chance that some day he's going to have the delightful pleasure of welcoming me as his son-in-law."

For an instant Carleton stared at him; then puckered his lips in a whistle of amazement. "The devil you say," he ejaculated, and then, after a moment, as if he could think of nothing that would better do justice to the situation, he repeated, with even greater emphasis, "The *devil* you say."

Vaughan sat silently enjoying his surprise; then, as his friend did not speak again, he said, a little anxiously, "I hope you're pleased, Jack."

Carleton recovered a little from his astonishment. The grip he gave Vaughan's hand was sufficient answer, even before he found his tongue. "Pleased," he echoed, "of course I am. I couldn't be more so. You know that without my saying it. But more than surprised, Arthur. I didn't know you were even interested in that direction. I can't realize it yet. Rose! Why, she hadn't put away her dolls when I left home. But three years. Let's see. Thirteen — fourteen — seventeen — that's right, she's almost eighteen, now. A child and a woman — I suppose that's the size of it. Well, well, Arthur, this is fine. And she's a splendid little girl, too. You're a lucky man. Any idea when you'll be married?"

Vaughan shook his head. "No, indeed," he answered, "I only wish I had. You see it's just as I told you. I'm a poor man, and I've got to make good first, before I can decently ask her to leave a home like the one she's got now. Mr. Carleton put all that part of it to me plainly enough yesterday. Plainly enough, and fairly enough, too. I have to admit that. But I can't help wishing, just the same, for once in my life, that I did have a little money to fall back on, or that my prospects were a little brighter. However, I surely can't complain; and now, Jack, it's your turn. How about yourself, and how about the ranching? Is it all you thought it would be?"

But Carleton did not seem disposed to talk of himself. "Oh, yes," he answered absently, "all that, and more. It's the greatest ever —" then, breaking off abruptly, he asked, "Do you know, Arthur, when Colonel Graham's expected back from England?"

Vaughan looked at him with a smile. "*Colonel* Graham?" he said, "did you say *Colonel,* Jack?"

Carleton nodded. "That's what I said," he answered, "Colonel Graham. You know I used to be pretty good friends with him once on a time."

Vaughan's smile broadened. "Yes, I know," he answered dryly, "and you used to be *very* good friends with some one else. Are you sure it isn't Marjory you mean, Jack, and not the colonel?"

At last Carleton smiled too. "Well," he returned, "I won't argue about it. You can put it that way if you like. When do they get back?"

"Three months, I believe," answered Vaughan, "I think that was what Rose said." He paused, then added with sympathy, "Sounds like a long time, too, I'll bet."

Carleton made no answer. Slackening speed, the train came to a halt, and rising, they filed down the aisle, and out on the Eversley platform, to find Henry Carleton and Cummings awaiting them. Somewhat perfunctorily Jack Carleton shook hands with Cummings; then turned to his uncle. "Wait for me just a minute," he said, "I've got a bag here somewhere," and he strode off into the station, while the others turned the corner, and took their places in Carleton's waiting motor, Cummings and Vaughan ushered by their host into the tonneau, while he himself took his seat in front with the chauffeur, a short, thick-set young fellow, with a round, pleasant face, honest eyes, and a frank and good-humored smile. He touched his cap, and Henry Carleton nodded in return. "Everything all right, Satterlee?" he asked, and the chauffeur quickly responded, "Yes, sir; everything all right, sir;"— then, very respectfully, as if he realized that his interest was leading him into a breach of strict decorum, "Isn't Mr. Jack coming, sir?"

"Oh, yes, he'll be here in a moment," answered his employer, and even as he spoke, Carleton appeared around the corner of the station, tossed his bag into the tonneau, and came up to the front of the machine with outstretched hand. "Well, Tom, old man," he cried, "and how are you? Looking fine. You couldn't drive anything but horses when I went away. How do you like this kind of thing? More speed, I guess, all right."

The chauffeur's answering smile was the friendliest imaginable, although his taking of Carleton's outstretched hand was a little reluctant, as if he were aware that this was a freedom hardly likely, in a servant, to find favor in his master's eyes. Henry Carleton, indeed, frowned with repressed disapproval. Kindness and even affability toward one's dependents were permissible — but this frank friendship, with its implication of equality, of which Jack was guilty, was apt to be destructive of a proper domestic régime. "We're waiting, Jack," he said, his meaning perfectly manifest in his tone, "jump in behind, please."

Jack Carleton was about to comply; then suddenly, either the beauty of the day or his lack of pleasure in Jim Cummings' society, served to make him change his mind. He stepped quickly back. "I guess I'll walk it, after all," he said, "just for the sake of old times. See you at the house," and before he had gone a quarter of the length of the station lane, a cloud of powdery dust was the only memento of the big motor left in sight.

Thoughtfully he traversed the familiar path, the meadow lying smooth and fair before him, still peaceful and serene as on the day when Helmar had walked there three years ago. The same outward world, the same green underfoot, the same glory of blue above. But though Helmar had found nothing but pleasure in the scene, now, mellowed and tinted with the oncoming of the summer night, Carleton's meditation ran in a quieter and sadder strain.

Midway at the bank of the little stream, he paused, and his thoughts, casting backward, were of the little boy who had sailed his boat in the pool below the bridge, and who had searched so patiently along the pleasant, grass-grown banks to gather and bring home in triumph to his mother the earliest violets of the spring. Tinged all with vague regret were his dreamings, as backward glances in one sense always must be, but even as his thoughts came down the years, his face did not seem to brighten with them.

"Three years," he muttered, "of good resolutions. Three years of killing out old hatred, and honestly trying to feel toward him as I ought. And now — almost the first day home — to be put back just where I was before. To find him the same as ever, so smooth, so self-satisfied, and so cursedly successful, too. And if I told any one what I believe — why, they'd think I was mad, I suppose."

Once more he started on his homeward way, taking the old familiar short-cut through the woods, as the twilight deepened and the shadows of the tall elms lengthened down the quiet road. Still lost in thought, he strode along unheeding; then all at once, struck with a sense of something unfamiliar, he pulled up sharply and glanced about him. The path he was following now was new to him, there was something about it which he could not call to mind, tax his memory as he would. And then suddenly, as he turned a sharp corner, tucked away amid the shelter of a grove of birches which rose about it on every hand, a little cottage appeared before his eyes.

For a moment he stood silent, staring in astonishment. Of this Henry had told him nothing. The Birches itself was still a good half mile away. "What in the world —" he muttered to himself, and then, obeying a sudden impulse, he turned aside, walked quickly up the path to the little house, mounted the steps leading to the porch, and knocked.

For a moment or two he waited. Then

somewhere above him, a window opened; a woman's voice called low, "Is it you?"

At the sound Carleton threw back his head with an uncontrollable start of astonishment; and then without raising his voice, he answered, "Yes, it's I."

The window closed. A moment still he waited in suspense, until the door cautiously opened. And then, suddenly, through the dusk there sounded a surprised cry, "Jack, Jack!"

Carleton took a quick step forward. Three long years, as far as seeing women of any attraction went, he had spent practically alone. Three long years, and in the girl before him what a change. Charming she had always been, yet now in looks, in dress, in bearing, in every way she had altered for the better a hundredfold. Almost with a gasp, the memories of old days came flooding over heart and mind and soul. His voice, when at last he spoke, sounded hoarse with stifled emotion; "Jeanne," he cried, "you!"

As of old, the woman seemed to dominate the situation. She laughed the old friendly laugh as she stepped backward into the gloom. Her words were commonplace enough, but not the tone in which she uttered them. "I'm glad to see you back, Jack," she said. "Won't you come in?"

CHAPTER XI

THE EVENTS OF AN EVENING

"What mighty ills have not been done by woman!"
Otway.

IT was nearly seven o'clock when Jack Carleton strolled into the carriage house, to find Satterlee, sleeves rolled up, his big rubber apron tied around his waist, busy washing the carriages. Leisurely Carleton took his seat upon an inverted bucket, and lit a cigarette. "So you use a horse now and then, too, do you, Tom?" he asked, "it isn't all automobiles?"

Satterlee grinned a little ruefully. "To speak true, Mr. Jack," he answered, "we gets a lot of trouble out of that there machine. The gentlemen walked the last quarter mile to-night, and she's out there in the road yet. You see, we got a new universal joint —"

Carleton raised his hand. "No, no," he cried, "you don't get me to listen to any of those yarns. I don't know anything about motors, and I don't want to. A horse is good enough for me. It isn't your automobile troubles I want to hear about, Tom. It's your own, if you've got any, only I don't believe you have. As near as I can make out, you're an infernally lucky man."

The chauffeur nodded. "I am that, sir," he answered, readily enough. "No man could have had better luck, or more of it, than I've had the last year. It seems sometimes to me, Mr. Jack, like it couldn't really be so. It's been most too much for one man."

Jack nodded. "It was all a surprise to me," he said. "Mr. Carleton never told me he'd built you the house; I didn't even know you were married. I wouldn't know it now if I hadn't happened to stop in there on the way up from the train. I only did it out of curiosity, too. I wondered who on earth had built that house, so near the big one."

Satterlee's face lit up with pleasure. "I'm more than glad you did, sir," he said. "It's a neat little place, if I am saying so. And you were after seeing the Mrs., I suppose?"

Jack nodded again. "Yes, indeed I did. She's prettier than ever, Tom. And she was telling me all about the house. So Mr. Carleton built it for you."

Satterlee pushed the wagon back into place, removed his apron, and took his stand in front of Carleton. "Yes, sir," he answered, "you see, it was like this. I always liked Jeanne fine — no one could help it, she's got that way with her — but I always thought as how she was more than a cut above me, being, as you might say, a lady, almost. And she never'd have much to say to me, either, excepting to pass the time of day, and such like things, you know, just friendly like, and nothing more. But about a year ago, of a sudden she began to seem to take more notice of me, and at last, never dreaming I was doing anything more than settle all my hopes of ever getting her, once and for all, I got that crazy about her I up and asked her — and she said she would. And then I didn't know what to do. I wanted to go to housekeeping, of course; I knew where I could rent a tidy little house down in the village, but I was feared of losing my job, if Mr. Carleton shouldn't seem to take kindly to the idea of it.

"Well, at last I told him, and he seemed pleased enough, and asked me about my plans, and so on, and finally he said he'd like to think it over for a while. So I said all right, of course, and one evening he came down here, and talked a long time, about how fine a thing it was to be married — he spoke something beautiful about his poor dear lady — and said as how that I'd always done my work right, and been a faithful man to him, and as how he knew Jeanne was a fine girl, and so on, and finally that he'd hate to have me leave him — I got scared then — but he didn't want me so far away as the village, and so, if I'd like it, partly for me, and partly for a good example to the rest of the house, he'd build me a cottage right here on the place, and set me up to housekeeping there. And that he did, and you've seen the cottage for yourself, so there's no need of my saying what a neat little place it is, or how happy we are. I like it fine, and Jeanne even more than me, I believe; you know what it is for a woman to have her own home to fuss round with; flowers and a vegetable garden, and all such things. We couldn't be better fixed in all the wide world."

Carleton slowly nodded. "Well, I should say not," he said at length. "And about the money, too. Jeanne was telling me of that."

Satterlee's face brightened. "Wasn't that the greatest ever?" he said. "I never knew she had relatives so well fixed as that; I guess she didn't, either; but Mr. Carleton looked after all the law part of it for her, and it seems she gets a steady income for the rest of her life. Not so much, of course, for some folks, but for her, you see, it's just pin money, to do as she likes with. Of course I'd never touch a cent of it; I'm doing pretty well myself, and I live simple, anyway; but she likes her fine clothes, and her trip in town, same as all the women do, and I'm glad to let her have the fun. Sometimes I get let off, too, but I don't like to go often; there's plenty doing here with six horses, and that rascal of a car. And this summer she's going off for two months to the mountains with some friends of hers. You see, the work gets slacker then; Mr. Carleton always goes away about that time, and it's pretty hot here, of course, for a woman, anyway. Yes, Jeanne's quite the lady now, and no one more glad than me."

Carleton, again nodding thoughtfully, sat for some time in silence without looking up. At last he raised his eyes to the chauffeur's. "Tom," he said, speaking with unwonted gravity, "I'd like to ask you one question. What do you really think —" Abruptly he broke off. "Well, speaking of angels," he muttered, and again was silent.

Down the drive Henry Carleton was walking briskly toward them, with a step that a youth of twenty might have envied. As he entered the carriage house, he eyed the pair a trifle keenly, it seemed, yet when he spoke his tone was amiability itself. "Ah, Jack," he said, "I wondered where you'd gone. Talking over old times with Satterlee, I suppose. We dine at seven, you know."

Carelessly Jack Carleton answered him. "Yes, I know. I'll be ready. Lots of time yet."

There was nothing in the words at which offense could be taken, yet at the tone Henry Carleton's eyebrows were raised a trifle. "Suit yourself," he said, "as long as you're not late," then turning to the chauffeur. "It's unfortunate about the motor, isn't it, Satterlee? I understand you to say that you can't possibly have it fixed before to-morrow night?"

Satterlee shook his head. "Oh, no, sir, not possibly," he answered. "I shall have to go in town to-morrow morning, and see them at the factory. And then there's a good half day, just on labor alone. No, sir, to-morrow night would be the very earliest possible."

Henry Carleton's face clouded a trifle, and for a moment he thought in silence. Then he spoke, with a little reluctance evident in his manner. "I don't like to ask you to do it, Satterlee, but I can't see any other way. I've promised to send a message over to Mr. Sheldon to-night, a message which is of great importance to both of us. I was going to ask you to take the motor, and go over after dinner — it wouldn't have taken much over an hour, I suppose — but that's out of the question now. Do you think, Satterlee, you could oblige me by taking one of the horses, and driving over. It will be something of a trip, I'm afraid."

Satterlee's assent could hardly have been readier, or more heartily given. "Of course I'll go, sir," he answered, "and be more than glad to. It's not too long a drive, sir. The night's fine. Let me see. Twelve miles over. Twelve miles back. I could take old Robin, sir, and make it in a matter of three hours, or I could take Fleetwood, in the sulky, and make it in pretty near an hour quicker, if there's haste."

Henry Carleton shook his head. "Oh, no, there's no special hurry," he answered, "and I wouldn't take Fleetwood, I think. I want to save him for Mr. Jack to drive to-morrow. No, I think I'd take old Robin. And I suppose you could get started by eight. If you'll stop at the house, then, Satterlee, I'll have everything ready, and I'm sure I'm much obliged to you. I won't forget it."

Satterlee's face showed his pleasure. There was a thoughtfulness and consideration in his master's manner unusual and agreeable. "You're more than welcome, I'm sure, sir," he said. "I'll be ready sharp at eight."

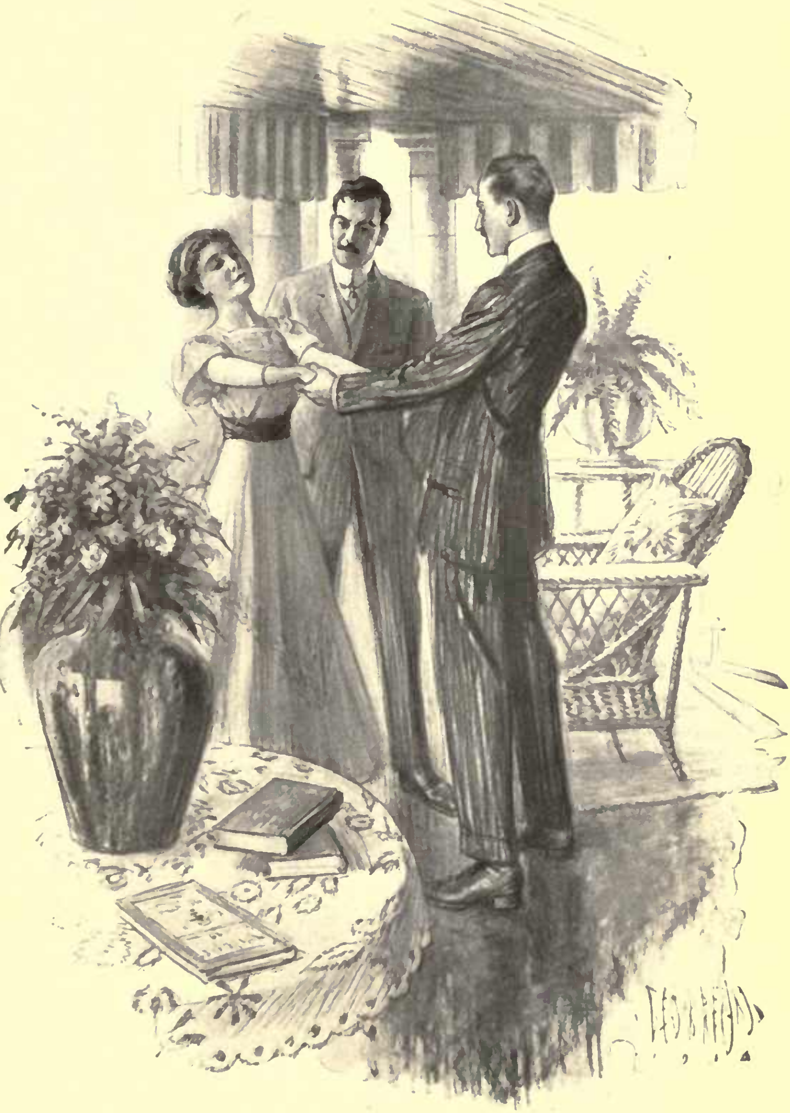
Jack Carleton had stood silent, with knitted brows. Now he looked up quickly, gazing at Henry Carleton with a singular intentness, considering the comparative unimportance of the matter involved.

"What's the matter with telephoning?" he asked abruptly, well-nigh rudely, in fact.

Henry Carleton smiled at him benignantly in return. "You always were fond of old Robin, weren't you, Jack?" he said. "Well, I hate myself to use a horse on a drive as long as that, and I hate to use Satterlee so late at night, besides. But these happen to be a set of plans, Jack, and you know to telephone plans is rather a difficult thing; and, since you've been so good as to interest yourself in the matter, I'll tell you further that they're street railway plans, of very great importance, considering the fact that Sheldon is my counsel before a committee of the legislature to-morrow morning. After all," he added more slowly, "it is a practical world, Jack. Some one has to look after things, even if it involves an evening trip, a horse and a man. But I suppose it's hard for you to get used to it. Yours never was the strictly practical side."

The tone was of kindly benevolence. That there was a deliberate purpose behind the words was evident. Jack Carleton's face gave no sign, save that all at once his eyes seemed suddenly to have turned hard and cold. "I see perfectly now," he answered. "Pardon my suggestion, won't you? I didn't know the drive was connected with any plans, or of course I shouldn't have spoken. Well, I guess I'll go ahead and dress for dinner now."

He turned with elaborate nonchalance, almost feeling Henry Carleton's searching glance follow him; and once, half way up the drive, he chuckled to himself, as if in his mind he felt perfectly satisfied with the result of the little encounter of words.



"I can't tell you how glad I am."—Page 201

As he mounted the piazza steps, from the cosy corner hidden far back among the ivy, Rose Carleton and Vaughan advanced a little consciously to meet him. Very possibly, from a certain tumbled look about her pretty curls and a flush in her cheeks suspiciously bright, he felt that he might have done well to enter the house from the side door. Yet, if he had proved an interrupter, she readily enough forgave him, coming forward with hands outstretched, and kissing him affectionately, first on one cheek and then on the other. "Well, cousin Jack," she cried, "it's seemed so long. Welcome home again; I can't tell you how glad I am."

He held her off at arm's length, looking at her with real affection in his glance, yet quizzically. "My dear," he said, "those are very nice kisses. You weren't as skilful as that when I left. But practice, I suppose, will do a lot for any one."

Rose Carleton's face flushed, but not at all with anger. She held up an admonishing finger. "Why," she cried, "I *am* surprised at you. Even to hint at such a thing," and then suddenly shifting the attack, "And what's made you such a judge of kisses, anyway? Were they experts out where you've been. I think you ought to explain, at least."

Carleton laughed. "Never mind, never mind," he said, "we'll change the subject at once; I'm getting embarrassed; but seriously, my dear, I wish you two people all the luck in the world. Nothing could please me better; you can be sure of that. But I'm not going to stay here and say nice things about you; I'll warrant you do enough of that yourselves to make you as proud as peacocks. And if I don't get ready for dinner, Henry'll give me a calling down; I know that much from old times," and with a friendly wave of his hand by way of parting benediction, he took his departure for his room.

To an outsider, it might have seemed that the company assembled for dinner was a somewhat curiously assorted one; yet the dinner itself, thanks to the efforts of the dark, observant man who presided at the head of the table, could hardly have been more successful. Tact — always tact — and in little things even more than in great, this was the feature that distinguished Henry Carleton's discharge of his duties as host. And once well under way, there was little reason, indeed, why the occasion should not have been a success. The meal was one for an epicure, deliciously cooked and faultlessly served, and with a quality and variety in the liquids which accompanied it, sufficient to satisfy even Cummings himself. Fortunate, indeed, it seemed, that Jack Carleton took nothing at all, and that Henry Carleton and Vaughan drank sparingly, for Cummings' capacity was frankly enormous. Constantly his red face grew redder and redder, and his conversation became every moment more and more monopolistic; yet Henry Carleton, with the courtesy of the host, seemed to pay no heed, and if there was any conflict between the laws of temperance and those of hospitality, the star of the latter seemed to be in the ascendant, for the butler was even more than assiduous in his attentions, and took good care that the bottom of Cummings' glass was never visible from the beginning of the dinner until the end.

A little late in beginning, it was doubtless due to Cummings' frank enjoyment of his food and drink, and his innocent delight in recounting at length anecdote after anecdote of which he was invariably the hero, that the dinner came to an end far later than Henry Carleton had anticipated. It was fully half-past eight, indeed, before he had the opportunity to slip out on the piazza, where Satterlee sat patiently waiting, with old Robin dozing peacefully between the shafts. "I'm sorry, Satterlee," he said, as he handed over the parcel; "I didn't mean to keep you waiting so long. I'm afraid it's going to be pretty late before you get back."

Satterlee gathered up the reins. "Close to midnight, I expect, sir," he answered cheerfully, "maybe later, if the old fellow doesn't happen to be feeling very brisk. But what's the odds? The night's fine, and there'll be a moon later on. It's no difference to me. Good night, sir. I'll be ready for the eight-two, in the morning," and he jogged leisurely away down the avenue.

The rest of the party, in the meantime, had joined their host on the piazza. Almost imperceptibly

Rose and Vaughan seemed to be again gravitating in the direction of the sheltered corner. Jack Carleton, observing them, smiled to himself; then turned to his host. "If you'll excuse me, Henry," he said, "I believe I'll go up to my room, smoke a pipe and turn in. I've been awfully short of sleep since I got back."

Henry Carleton, the hospitable, with the greatest readiness assented. "Why, of course, Jack, don't talk of my excusing you. No such ceremony as that out here. Turn in, and sleep the clock around, if you want to. Come on, Cummings. You and I will have a little game of billiards, if that'll suit you."

"Suit me?" echoed Cummings expansively, "well, I guess yes. Surest thing you know." This, he reflected to himself, was certainly going some. This was being treated better than ever before. A bang-up dinner; all the fizz he wanted — that, from Cummings, meant much — and now a game of billiards with the old man. And billiards was his particular long suit. No wonder that he was perfectly happy. Scarcely, it seemed to him, could he wait until the next morning, to see the other fellows in the office, and recount all his good fortune to their well-nigh unbelieving ears. "Surest thing you know," he repeated again, "just what I'd like to do."

Left alone, Rose Carleton and Vaughan retreated under the shadow of the vines. For a little while, indeed, with a self-restraint most commendable, their talk was not wholly of themselves. A few words they had to say about Jack; a few, with bated breath, concerning Cummings and his peculiarities; a brief account Vaughan gave of his wholly pleasant and successful interview with Henry Carleton, and then, in spite of themselves, their talk swung around into the path of that endless circle which engrosses so absolutely the attention of those happy persons but newly engaged, and soon, all unconsciously, they had drifted away into the realms of the small but all-sufficing world which can never be inhabited by more than two.

Meanwhile, up-stairs in the billiard room Jim Cummings was enjoying himself always more and more. The table was perfect; the cigar from the box which Henry Carleton had carelessly shoved toward him he had appraised with a critical eye, and instantly classified as a twenty-five-cent straight; at his elbow, on the neat little sideboard, were liqueurs, and Scotch and soda. Only a victory at the game was needed to make for Cummings a perfect world, and that finally was also forthcoming. Not easily, indeed; old Carleton, to his infinite surprise, played a most surprising game, marred only by a tendency to slip up on easy shots after he had made a run of those which almost any amateur in the city might have envied. The first game went to Cummings, the second to his host, the third and rubber at last, after the closest of finishes, to Cummings again. And then, pulling their chairs up to the little table, they sat for perhaps half an hour and talked. Cummings, indeed, seemed to be the leader as far as number of words went; Carleton apparently doing little more than to make a suggestion here, propound a difficulty there, and then finally to allow himself to be assured by Cummings' lordly manner of overcoming every obstacle in the path. At last they rose; the lights in the billiard room were extinguished, and Carleton left his guest at the door of the bedroom allotted to him. "So I think," he said, laying a friendly hand on Cummings' arm, "that, as between two men of the world, we may fairly say that we perfectly understand each other."

Cummings' speech was a trifle thick, something scarcely to be wondered at, but his step was steady, and his brain clear. "Perfe'ly," he responded. "No misund'standing at all. Perfe'ly, I'm sure."

Henry Carleton looked at him sharply. He was well aware of the quantity of liquor his guest had somehow managed to put away. "And just one thing," he added, "you won't forget that it's got to be done quietly. That's the important thing. You can't be too careful. It's a most delicate mission. That, Jim," he added in a burst of confidence, "is why I selected you."

Cummings' immediate expansion was visible to the eye. "I 'preciate your choice," he responded handsomely, "and I un'erstand just how you want it done. 'S that enough, or d'you want talk some more?"

Henry Carleton whipped out his watch. "No, no," he answered hastily, "it's late now, Jim. Later than I thought. We understand each other, of course. Do your best, that's all. And, Jim," he added, with a curious note, almost, one would have said, of entreaty, in his tone, "you understand my motives perfectly, don't you? You see my reasoning? You're convinced that I'm acting for the best?"

Singular enough it was to see the great financier verging on an appeal to a man in every way so far his inferior. Cummings, even in his slightly befuddled condition, seemed to appreciate the honor conferred. "Mr. Carleton," he answered, "I un'erstand 'ntirely. Your motives irreproachable; no one say otherwise, by possibility."

Henry Carleton looked his relief. "Good," he said briefly. "I shouldn't proceed without your approval of the plan. And you will bear in mind the need of haste, I know."

It was five minutes later that he rejoined his daughter and Vaughan upon the piazza, with his usual thoughtfulness emerging slowly from the house, and clearing his throat somewhat ostentatiously several times by way of fair and friendly warning. It may have been that this signal was needed, it may have been that it was not; in any event, when Henry Carleton had actually reached the cosy corner, it was to find Rose and Vaughan seated decorously enough some distance apart, although for the moment, indeed, conversation between the two appeared to have come completely to a standstill.

Henry Carleton eyed them benevolently. "A beautiful night," he observed impartially, and then, more especially addressing himself to Rose, "Did you know that it was after half-past ten, my dear. Early to bed, you know."

In the darkness Rose Carleton frowned impatiently. Yes, she knew. That she should retire early was one point on which her father insisted with a strictness that made it hopeless to contest the point with him. "Early to bed." She felt a huge dislike for the worthy originator of the phrase. Even the soundest and sanest of maxims, without the occasional exception which proves the rule, may come to mean next to nothing. "Yes, I know it," she answered shortly, with just a trace of irritated rebellion in her tone. Eighteen does not relish being treated like twelve.

Her father noted the tone. "Well, good night, my dear," he observed evenly. "Say good night to Mr. Vaughan, and don't forget to be up in good season to-morrow. We shall be a little hurried without the motor. You must have our coffee ready for us sharp on time." Then, a pause ensuing, without any move seeming to come from Rose, he added persuasively, "I trust you and Mr. Vaughan have enjoyed your evening together, my dear."

There was a hint of mild reproach in his tone, and at the words forthwith the girl relented. It was true enough. He had been considerate to allow her to have Vaughan to herself for the evening. It would have been easy to have managed things otherwise. He was a pretty good father, after all. So obediently she rose and gave her hand to Vaughan, with just sufficient pressure to let him understand that had the occasion served, her good night would have been a very different one, kissed her father, and went quietly up-stairs.

Left alone, Vaughan turned to Henry Carleton. "Cummings turned in?" he asked casually.

Carleton nodded. "Yes, he's turned in, I believe," he answered; then, with the hospitality for which he was famous, he added, "Is there anything more that I may chance to be able to do for your entertainment, Mr. Vaughan?"

Vaughan shook his head. "Oh, thanks, no," he answered, "I'm ready for bed myself, I believe."

"Very well," said Carleton quickly, "then I think, in that case, if you will excuse me, I'll take my little turn about the grounds and retire myself. If you should care for a pipe on the piazza, the house is always open. We don't lock up here at all. I always say, if a burglar is going to try to break into a country house, that's all windows and doors, a key turned in the lock isn't going to stop him. So you can get in at any time between now and morning."

Vaughan laughed. "Thanks," he answered, "that's genuine kindness, but I don't think I shall take advantage of it. A bed seems more attractive to me just now than a pipe even."

"Suit yourself," answered Carleton, "I'll have my man call you in the morning. Good night."

He turned indoors as he spoke, and Vaughan stood silent for perhaps five minutes, looking out into the glorious summer night, with his thoughts where they could scarcely have failed to be — on the wonderment of all the happiness that had come to him, on the difference that the love of a girl had made in him, his ambitions, his hopes, of all the great things that he longed to accomplish now for her sake, to show her that perhaps she had not chosen unworthily.

Then, coming suddenly to himself, he decided that it would be pleasant to accompany Carleton on his rounds, looked indoors for him, and not finding him there, concluded that he must have gone out by some other way. Coming out once more on to the piazza, he stood for a moment irresolute, had even made a hesitating step toward the house again, and then, summoned irresistibly by some subtle kinship with tree and flower, star and whispering breeze, he walked hastily down the steps, and then, more leisurely, strolled away around the curve of the drive until his figure was lost amid the shrubbery of the lawn.

Surely Henry Carleton's little evening had been enjoyed to the full by every one. And, as it chanced, even the humblest actor in it was to have his share of luck. Tom Satterlee, with some two thirds of his journey to Mr. Sheldon's accomplished, suddenly gripped the reins more tightly as a warning blast fell on his ears, and a moment later a big motor whizzed past him from the rear. Instantly he recognized the chauffeur, driving alone, and the next moment his cheerful hail had brought the motor to a halt. Then ensued a brief conference, resulting in the transfer of the package, while Satterlee, with a good hour saved from the schedule that was to bring him back at midnight, in high good humor turned old Robin's head toward home.

Meanwhile, back at The Birches, Vaughan wandered idly along, his feet on earth, his thoughts in the clouds. Rose and his book. His book and Rose. From one to the other his thoughts plied back and forth. Not, indeed, that the book could ever rival Rose, but it was as a means to win her that it now appeared most precious to him, as if his written word, as something outside of himself, were striving, like some faithful friend, to aid him in his fight — and Rose and the book and his happiness blended in his mind with all the intoxication of youth and hope, and a world still untried and unconquered, its problems undespaired of still.

On and on he walked, half unconscious of where he was going, and then, on a sudden he seemed to become aware of a light flashing somewhere ahead of him through the trees, now disappearing, now, as he went onward, springing again into view, much as some gigantic will-o'-the-wisp might have done. And at the same instant, looking around him, he perceived, to his surprise, that unconsciously he had been following the trail of a little rough hewn path, winding first to right, and then to left, but always forward, and always toward the light. Partly from a real curiosity as to what it might be, partly with enough of the instinct of boyhood days left in him, to make him feel a perfectly irrational delight in the sense of nocturnal adventure, he skirted his way along through the woods, and a moment later found himself standing on a little elevation of rock, gazing through the trees at the house which stood over across from him, not a hundred yards away, amid the circle of birches which, gleaming like silver in the faint moonlight, surrounded it with their protection as with a natural palisade.

Something singular there seemed to him about the whole affair. The cottage he could not place; and idly he began to wonder whether, intent upon his day-dreams, he had wandered farther than he had intended, and had crossed the boundaries of The Birches to trespass on some neighboring domain. His vivid imagination had even begun to weave a web of vague, elusive romance about the cottage itself, based partly, perhaps, on the spell of the moonlight, partly on the fact that despite the lateness of the hour a light still gleamed in the upper, and one in the lower, hall. And then, with a realizing rush of sober common sense, with a smile at his wandering fancies, he came back to real life again, and had turned, though half regretfully, to go, when suddenly, at the very instant, he stopped, and again stood still. A dark figure had come across the lawn in the rear of the house, walked up to the door without reconnoitering, and disappeared within.

A moment or two of silence. Then the light down-stairs was extinguished, and an instant later the one above was suddenly darkened, until only the faintest glimmer remained. And again Vaughan, though half doubtfully this time, smiled at his folly. Surely this was the novelist at his worst. Striving to find something unusual and strange, worthy of his notice and comment, in what? In the coming home of some prosaic householder, doubtless tempted into a longer stay than usual at the village by the charms of the good fellowship of tavern or grocery store.

Suddenly his heart leaped. What was that? Something mysterious was on foot, then, after all. From within the house came sounds as if of a struggle — a crash, as of furniture overturned — a single half-choked, muffled cry. Then a rush and clatter of feet on the stairs, and then, before his wide-open, straining eyes, from the rear door of the house a figure emerged, followed almost instantly by another. The pursued, the taller and slimmer of the two, and evidently by far the fleeter of foot, ran, as one who knows his ground, straight for the thickest cluster of trees, and reaching them, dived into their shelter like a hare. The pursuer, following for a space, all at once slackened his speed, swerving and bearing aimlessly away, constantly farther and farther to the left, in a wide half circle, his body bent all the time more and more to one side, his head thrown back and upward, as if spent and exhausted, even with the brief effort he had made. And finally, fairly doubling on his tracks, he came headed straight for the rock at the summit of which Vaughan stood. Nearer and nearer he came, and then, quickly, as in the faint moonlight the man's face became more plainly visible, Vaughan drew one instant gasping breath of sickened horror. The face was set, as if rigid with agony, the eyes were unnaturally wide, and over the upturned forehead and the pallid cheeks flowed something hideously dark and glistening. And then, convulsively, with a ghastly semblance of an athlete who finishes his race, the figure threw one arm high into the air, as if grasping for support, staggered, pitched forward, and fell motionless, lying, in the darkness below, a huddled heap in the road.

To Vaughan, all unschooled in the darker experiences of life, came a sudden access of blind terror. He knew that he should at once descend, yet, knowing it, stood motionless, his will unequal to the task. And then, as he sought to nerve himself for the trial, nature intervened. At once he was conscious that his heart was throbbing so faintly and so fast that his ear could scarcely separate the beats; something tightened in his throat; the silver birches floated and turned before him, and he found himself nearer fainting than he had ever been in his life before. Slowly, after what seemed to him an indefinite period of semi-consciousness, his brain again cleared; distrustingly he loosed his hold on the sapling which he had grasped, and with genuine courage, sought once more to approach the edge of the little cliff and begin his descent.

Yet that descent, spite of his newly taken resolution, was now never to be made. At the edge he gave one shuddering look below, then hastily and with caution drew back, peering fixedly through the screen of leaf and branch. The man, indeed, still lay where he had fallen, but now, creeping down the driveway, came the first figure, returning, as if impelled by some impulse too powerful to resist. Stealthily it approached the huddled figure on the ground, looked around listening, then swiftly knelt, turned the body over, and raised the head upon its knee. Then came the quick spurt of a match, and Vaughan, leaning forward with fascinated gaze, saw more than he wished to see — saw what he would have given anything in the world not to have seen; for the motionless figure, with head drooped horribly to one side, hair matted, and face streaked and dabbled with red, was that of Tom Satterlee, and the face which bent over him, showing pale and horror-stricken in the light of the tiny flame, was the face of Jack Carleton. Vaughan turned and ran.

CHAPTER XII

THE YELLOW STREAK

> "A plague on all cowards, I say."
>
> *Shakespeare.*

FROM a slumber that was scarcely a sleep, a slumber feverish and fitful, broken by restless starts and uneasy twitchings, Arthur Vaughan suddenly opened his eyes, on the instant broad awake. For just one blank moment, as has happened with mankind so many million times before, as will happen so many million times again, his brain seemed to hang motionless, without impression of any sort; and the next minute across it the blurred and distorted images of the night before were rushing and crowding their way with a sense almost of physical suffocation and terror. He had half started from his bed, when at the same moment the knock on the door which had first awakened him was repeated. " Come in," he called, and at the word the door opened, and Henry Carleton's valet softly entered and began to pull back the curtains. For a moment Vaughan lay motionless, watching the man, and wondering instinctively if he knew; then, trying hard to speak in a tone casual and off-hand, he greeted him. "Good morning, Rollins."

Swiftly and silently the man turned. His face, to Vaughan's relief, appeared perfectly impassive. "Good morning, sir," he returned respectfully. "A fine morning out, sir," and then, after a hardly perceptible pause — Vaughan could almost feel the words coming — "There was bad doings last night, sir."

Vaughan had risen, and was slowly crossing the room toward his bath. He stopped abruptly. "And what was that, Rollins?" he asked.

The valet stepped a little nearer, speaking in a hushed and somewhat awe-struck tone. "It was poor Satterlee," he answered. "He's dead, sir. They found him this morning, outside his house, with his head all bashed in. Stone dead, sir. I was there when they brought him in. It was a horrid sight to see; —" and then, with real feeling, the man, and not the servant in him uppermost, he added, " Poor Tom. He was that happy, sir."

Vaughan still stood without moving. " Dead," he repeated mechanically, " Good God ! " and then, " His head, you say ? Why, do they think —"

The man shook his head. " Nobody knows anything, sir," he answered. " It was right near his house; right underneath a big high rock; he might have fell off, or been pushed off; you couldn't tell. Of course, sir, they've sent for the medical examiner, direct. He should be here in an hour or two, I should judge, sir, at the most."

" Yes, yes," Vaughan assented. " I understand ; " then at once added, " and what does Mr. Carleton say ? "

" Oh, he feels terribly, sir," the valet answered, " I never saw him so broke up in my life. ' Poor Satterlee,' he kept saying, ' I feel as if I was to blame. I shouldn't have asked him to go that far, so late. It was after hours. I should have waited.' "

Vaughan nodded. " Yes, that's like Mr. Carleton," he said. " But of course it wasn't any of his fault, just the same. He couldn't have looked ahead to anything like that."

"No, indeed, sir," the man answered heartily, "of course he couldn't. But as you say, sir, it's like him. He's always very considerate with all of us. Oh, he certainly took on terrible; he was as white as a sheet when they brought poor Tom in."

"Yes, yes," said Vaughan absently, "I don't doubt;" then quickly, "and how about Mr. Jack?"

"Why, he was in a bad way, too, sir," answered Rollins, "but different like, more quiet, as if he had his wits more about him."

In spite of himself, at the words Vaughan started, and then, "What about the horse?" he asked.

"That was curious, sir," the man replied, "the horse was in, unharnessed and in his stall; seems as if Tom must have got back early, after all. But no one knows how."

As he spoke, in the hall outside a bell rang sharply and at once he turned to answer it, then paused. "That's Mr. Carleton, sir," he said, and then with a quick return to his usual manner, "Is there anything further you might wish, sir?" and on Vaughan's half-mechanical answer in the negative, he hastily left the room.

It was on a disturbed and disordered household that Vaughan half an hour later descended. Rose alone came to meet him as he reached the foot of the stairs, and in silence led the way into the deserted breakfast room.

"You won't find very much to eat, Arthur, I'm afraid," she said. "You mustn't mind. Everything's so terribly upset."

He bent and kissed her, pitying her white face and trembling hands. "My dear girl," he said tenderly, "don't worry about me. Breakfast doesn't count at a time like this. Where has everybody gone?"

The girl, pouring out his coffee, helplessly shook her head. "Oh, I don't know," she answered. "It's all been so confused. My father's gone down to see Mrs. Satterlee, I believe, and Mr. Cummings is outside somewhere, too. He seemed to feel it as much as any one. He really looked very badly, and hardly touched his breakfast at all. And

Cousin Jack — I don't know where he's gone. I suppose he minded more than anybody; he was always around so much with Tom in the old days out here. He acted so queerly, too; and looked at everybody so — oh, I don't know how to describe it — stern and fierce, as if somehow he thought we all had something to do with Tom's being killed. And all the time father kept saying things, like that in the midst of life we were in death, and that no man could tell the hour — oh, it was all ghastly. It was awful."

Vaughan, nibbling gingerly at the cold toast, and struggling to swallow the luke-warm coffee, nodded understandingly. Every instinct, every bit of good sense that he possessed, told him to drop the subject, and still, for the life of him he could not check the words that rose to his lips. "Did you — did you see him?" he asked.

The girl shuddered. "Not close to," she answered, "only when they brought him by the house. I didn't know — I looked — once. I wish I hadn't. Oh, his face —"

Abruptly, a little dizzily, Vaughan rose from the table, last night's ugly vision again seeming to pass before his swimming eyes. On the instant the girl, all penitence, rose also, coming swiftly around to his side. "Forgive me, dear," she cried, "I didn't mean to shock you. I should have thought. Excuse me, please."

He hastened to take her hand. "No, no," he cried, "there's nothing to forgive. It's not your fault. Let's get outside in the air. It's close in here. I feel a little faint."

A moment later they stood on the broad piazza, in all the glory of the warm June sunshine. Up in the top of a swaying elm an oriole flooded the air with song; out over the lawn, against the green of the shrubbery, a big golden butterfly floated softly along; in and out of the vines above their heads a tiny humming-bird — a living gem — darted here and there, his crimson throat flashing like flame in the sunlight — then quick as thought with a whir of his swiftly moving wings, was gone. Life — life — life — in every tone and call of nature's voice,— and out there, in the hushed quiet of the stable, a man lay dead.

Vaughan rested a hand on the girl's arm. "Look," he whispered, "down by the road."

The girl raised her eyes. There, dimly to be seen through the screen of the shrubbery, up and down, up and down, a figure paced, with eyes fixed on the ground, with one hand tugging fiercely at his mustache, to and fro — to and fro. "Cousin Jack," she said.

Silently Vaughan nodded. Well enough, from the uncertain tumult going on in his own mind, he could guess the bitter struggle that was being waged in Carleton's. In an hour the medical examiner would come; all would in turn be examined on oath. Henry Carleton, doubtless, would be the first called upon to testify; then Jack; then, he supposed, Cummings and himself. And what should he do? The truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth — the words seemed aimlessly to sing themselves over and over in his brain. And then, with a shake of his head, he roused himself. One thing was plain. Before the examiner came, there must be some plan of concerted action between Jack Carleton and himself — some knowledge of what each was going to say when called on to face that grim ordeal. And it might be that there was little time to spare. He turned quickly to Rose. "I'm going to speak to him," he said.

She made a protesting movement. "Oh, must you?" she cried, "I so hate to be left alone, just now," but for once her lover was firm. "I must, dear," he said, "I won't be long. You stay right here, and don't worry or think about it at all. I've got to see him for a minute, anyway; I won't be long," and as she released her detaining hold on his arm, he walked swiftly down the steps and across the lawn.

On the velvet of the yielding turf his footsteps made no sound, his figure cast no shadow, and it was not until he was almost upon Carleton that the latter glanced up. Deep in thought he must have been, for to Vaughan it seemed that it was for a full half minute, at the least, that Carleton continued to gaze, hardly at him, but rather beyond, as if for all that time he was unable to call his thoughts back to the present. And even when he had done so, his greeting sounded scarcely cordial, as if he would greatly have preferred being left alone without interruption of any kind, however well intended.

"Hello, Arthur," he said, "you've heard about it, I suppose."

Vaughan nodded. "Yes, I've just heard." For a moment he faltered, uncertain how to proceed; then, lamely enough, he added, "How was he killed, Jack?"

Carleton looked at him strangely; and, almost roughly, he answered, "Killed? How should he have been killed? Fell off that rock, of course." He paused for a moment in his turn; then, with a singular distortion of the muscles of his mouth that gave to his expression a look almost ghastly, he added, with a kind of savage emphasis, "He took one drink too many, I suppose; poor devil; it's an ugly rock."

Tone and words alike sounded utterly foreign to him. He stood staring at Vaughan, as he spoke, but still as if he scarcely saw or heeded him, as if he strove to map out for himself a path in the tangled net of circumstance which threatened him.

Vaughan, regarding him, drew a long breath, and grasped his courage in both his hands. " Look here, Jack," he said, forcing the words with effort, " Mr. Carleton and I were on the piazza last night about half past ten. I told him I was going to turn in, and he said he was going to do the same after he'd taken a little walk around the place. I started for bed, and then I changed my mind.— I went for a walk too."

At once Carleton seemed to catch an unusual meaning in the other's tone, and yet for a moment the real import of the words did not dawn on his brain. Then suddenly he started, half drawing away. " You went for a walk ? " he echoed, and then, apparently throwing aside all caution, " What do you mean, Arthur ? " he cried, " What do you mean ? "

Vaughan, hesitating still, dreading the effect his words might have, almost regretting that he had spoken at all, looked his friend squarely in the face. " I saw it all, Jack," he said.

Carleton's look was one of utter amazement. For an instant he stood silent, staring at Vaughan as if doubtful of his senses. Then, " You saw him run out of the house? " he cried.

Vaughan nodded. " I saw it all," he repeated, " and afterward, by the rock —"

But to everything beyond his mere assent Carleton seemed to pay scant heed. He stared at Vaughan still, but now with a strange mingling of emotions showing in his face. And curiously enough, there seemed to predominate, above all the rest, a look almost of savage relief.

" That clenches it, then," he cried. " That settles the whole thing," and, swift as thought, the next moment the expression faded. " No, no, Arthur," he cried, with the most intense earnestness, " we can't; don't you see we can't? See what would happen. There'd be the devil and all to pay. Rose might not marry you, even. You know how proud she is. It isn't a question of what I ought to do myself, Arthur. It's a question of the family honor. It mustn't be known; it shan't. We'll tell the same story. No one else knows, man. No one that would tell. It's the only way. Give me your word, Arthur; give me your word."

In silence Vaughan stood and looked at him. These were the same temptations that had beset him the long night through; against which his instinctive feeling of justice had struggled well-nigh in vain. And yet, while gropingly and half-unconsciously he had felt that for him there might be some excuse, somehow now, the frank cowardice of the plea, coming from the man himself, jarred strangely upon him. And yet — was it cowardice? Was there not more than a grain of truth in all that Carleton had said? Would it not, after all, be for the best? For there, on the other hand, lay the scandal to be faced; the notoriety of it all, scarcely endurable; the hordes of prying reporters; the vulgar crowd of eager seekers after mystery who would make of Eversley a very Mecca — from all this he shrank, as he could see that Carleton shrank, and yet, in spite of all, from the other alternative he shrank as well.

"What do you want me to say?" he asked, and his tone was grudging; his eyes this time did not seek Jack's face.

Carleton drew a sigh of evident relief. "Say?"

he echoed eagerly. "What should you want to say? You were abed and asleep the whole time. You went straight up-stairs and slept soundly all night. That's simple enough, isn't it? Of course Henry'll swear that you told him that's what you were going to do. Swear to it, and stick to it. That's all."

Slowly Vaughan nodded. "And you the same?" he asked.

"Of course," Carleton answered eagerly, and at his manner Vaughan found himself all at once marveling. Whatever else of emotion he might feel in the medley of sensations which swept over him, above everything else he was conscious of a stinging disappointment, an open shame, for this man — his friend. He turned away, his voice as he answered, sounding dully in his own ears. "All right," he said. Then suddenly a new difficulty struck him with stunning force. "But what's the use, Jack?" he cried, "Mrs. Satterlee —"

Carleton took one quick step forward. "Everything's the use," he said, almost menacingly. "Do as I tell you, for God's sake! Don't worry about the woman. Her testimony will be the same as ours. Nobody knows anything. Can't you see? Or don't you know what sort of woman —"

Across the lawn Rose Carleton's voice sounded, vibrant with anxiety. "Arthur, Cousin Jack," she called, "you're wanted at once. The medical examiner is here."

The *Columbian* reporter, jotting down a note or two, rose from his seat at the examiner's desk. "I'm very much obliged, sir," he said. "That clears *that* matter up. You've told me exactly what I wanted to know. And on this last case that came in to-day, the coachman out at the Carleton place, you say there won't be anything doing?"

The medical examiner shook his head in decided negative. "The coroner's verdict," he answered, "not of course speaking officially, or for quotation in any way, will be one of accidental death. Of that I am morally certain. There wasn't a shred of evidence to prove anything different. Or, one chance in ten, perhaps, at the most, it might be 'death at the hands of persons unknown.'"

The reporter sighed. "It's too bad, though, isn't it?" he rejoined. "All the elements of a great story there somewhere"— he paused a moment; then added thoughtfully, "I'm not jollying, you know; I really am awfully disappointed. Because — it's a queer thing — if there was any evidence for a starter, I could furnish some mighty interesting information in a certain direction. Do you know anything about the wife of this man that was killed, this Mrs. Satterlee?"

The examiner shook his head. "Nothing," he answered, "excepting that I couldn't help but notice that she was a remarkably beautiful woman. Entirely out of her class as the wife of a coachman, I should have said."

"Exactly," the reporter exclaimed. "Well, now, listen to this. If anybody wanted to hear some mighty funny evidence concerning this woman, and concerning one of the men who was at the Carleton place the night this happened — not gossip, you know, but something that I actually know about, saw with my own eyes — if anybody wanted to get hold of that, why, I rather think —"

The examiner raised a restraining hand. "Well, don't think," he said curtly. "You ought to know enough about the laws of evidence to stop you from figuring that two and two make five. And, anyway, don't think too hard. It's an awful strain on a man. Your business, as I understand it, as a reporter on the *Columbian,* is to report facts, and not to come any of these gum-shoe sleuth tricks."

The reporter smiled, wrinkling his forehead whimsically. "Your ideas of facts and mine," he rejoined, "might not tally, exactly, but in the main, yes, I guess you're right." He rose to take his leave. "And still," he said again, "I can't help wishing there was just a little evidence to go to the district attorney's office. If there should be, now —"

"Well, there won't," snapped the examiner, "you needn't worry. I tell you the case ends here."

The reporter raised his eyebrows, at the same time making a deprecating gesture with arms and shoulders. "Oh, all right, all right," he said soothingly. "Just as you say." He held the door fully open now. "Oh, and look," he added, "which Cummings was it that was spending the night out there? The railroad man, or Jim?"

The examiner did not look up from his writing. "Jim," he answered shortly.

The reporter half closed the door again. "Say," he observed engagingly, "now that's another mighty funny thing —"

The medical examiner wheeled suddenly on him. "Oh, come, come," he said, "get out. You make me tired. You know too much altogether. There's one thing you don't know, though. That I'm busy sometimes — even too busy to listen to you and your 'funny things,' as you call them. Now, get out."

The reporter was on the farther side of the threshold now. He paused for one parting shot. "I'll bet you a dollar," he said, "that things don't stop here for good. I'll bet you a dollar — I'll bet you five — that some day we hear of this case again."

There was no response. He waited a moment in silence. And then the door at last closed behind him.

CHAPTER XIII

VAUGHAN DOUBTS

> "Truth is the highest thing that man may keep."
>
> *Chaucer.*

ONCE again the household at The Birches had settled down into its wonted routine of daily life. Yet with a difference, too, for over the whole place the shadow of the tragedy still hung. Henry Carleton, deeply affected at the loss of a faithful and valued servant, showed his sorrow by making no attempt to replace him, letting the motor lie idle, and promoting Saunders, the former groom, to the coachman's vacant post. Mrs. Satterlee herself, very pretty and very sad in deepest black, continued to live alone at the cottage, going out but seldom and seemingly well-nigh inconsolable in her grief. Just once, Rose Carleton, feeling vaguely repulsed in the visit or two she had made to her one time nurse, had gone to her father's study to question him in regard to the widow's position. "Is it quite proper, father," she had asked, "for her to live there now, all alone? Don't you think people may begin to talk ill-naturedly about her?"

Henry Carleton had sat thoughtfully for a time before he had made answer, and then, "Poor woman," he said, with deep feeling, "this has been a heavy blow for her. And but such a short time married, too. Really, I hardly know what to say, and yet, for the present, at least, I think I should allow her to remain. To me it would seem heartless to do otherwise. Too much as if, just because poor Satterlee were of no further use to me, I was anxious to cast off his widow also. I understand your feeling in the matter, Rose, and I appreciate the kindness you have shown in speaking of it, but in time of sorrow and affliction, the breath of scandal seems but a secondary consideration. Duty first, my child, come what may," and Rose, ashamed of her prudishness, had risen and kissed him.

"You're right, father," she cried hastily, "as you always are. If there's anything I can do to make things easier for her, you've only to tell me." Henry Carleton, with a little smile, had thanked her, and the incident had been closed.

Across Jack Carleton's path the shadow of Satterlee's tragic death seemed to lie dark and unforgetable. For a day or two, indeed, morose and grave, he continued to make The Birches his home; then, suddenly, he took his departure, going back to his in-town lodgings, and The Birches knew him no more.

But of all the changes caused by the doings of the night, the most marked had taken place in Arthur Vaughan. With him, indeed, all else apart, things had been going badly enough to warrant discouragement. First of all, after a week or two of indulgence in ever strengthening hope, coming home one hot and breathless evening to his lodging house, he had found an envelope with Small and White's name in the corner awaiting him on the table in the hall. With it there appeared no bulky parcel of type-written sheets, and on the instant his heart beat rapidly at twice its usual speed. Could it be at last the turning point in the long, straight path of disappointments? Somehow he could not bring himself to open the letter there, and in spite of weariness, of the almost overpowering heat of the day, he ran up the three flights of stairs, never stopping until he had reached the shelter of his own bare and simply furnished room.

Even then he still hesitated, scarcely even bringing himself to glance at the missive that burned in his hand. Once more he looked about him, at the familiar, friendly old arm-chair, at the battered desk in the window, with the manuscript sheets of his new story scattered over its surface, then out at the restful green of the big elm tree whose spreading branches almost touched his window, screening the whole room with their welcome shade. All of these he had come to know and hail as friends, and natural enough it seemed to him that now in the hour of his joy he should wish to take them into his confidence, and to bid them rejoice with him at last. With a final look from the window down into the quiet, deserted street below, he resolutely tore open the letter, and ran his eye over the first line or two of its contents — then, with a sharp intake of breath he raised his eyes, and stood silent and motionless, his face suddenly white, as though he had received some mortal blow. It was over, then. The first three lines were enough. He knew that stereotyped form so well. "We are returning to you to-day"— that was sufficient — he could have gone on and completed the letter, with scarcely the miscalling of a single word. Yet presently, with a self-contemptuous smile, he took up the letter again, and read it, slowly and deliberately, as a man might run a sword inch by inch into his body, stopping now and again to give it a little extra twist or turn stoically to watch himself twinge and wince with the pain, eyes closing, mouth contorted.

And anguish of soul, indeed, every whit as bitter Arthur Vaughan now knew. Hardly had he realized, after his friendly chat with Henry Carleton, and the words of encouragement he had received from that practised man of affairs, how thoroughly he had discounted the future. Down in the bottom of his heart he knew now that for a fortnight he had really cherished the belief that all would at last come right, that the book would be taken, that his name would be made, that his marriage with Rose would be but a question of a longer or shorter time; and now, hopes dashed, he was back again where he had started; nay, worse off, indeed, for another possible chance was lost to him, another publisher had set the seal of disapproval on his work — oh, it was all too bitter!

Mechanically he read and re-read the letter. All were there — all the little catch words, the honeyed phrases which said one thing, yet were made to say it so smoothly and courteously that at the end he half doubted that after all, his work had been refused; — all were there. "We are returning" — yes, that seemed enough, almost, but still they had to go on,—"manuscript you have been so kind as to submit,"— oh, of course, it had been such a kindness on his part,—"reading it has occasioned us much pleasure,"— pleasure! Of what sort, Vaughan wondered; "it has many obvious merits," — why didn't they take it, then? — "and some equally obvious defects."— Ah, yes, the defects;

that was it, of course, the defects; that phrase, he felt, at least was sincere.—"Only after careful deliberation — at last unwillingly compelled to come to the conclusion — present state of the public taste — certain practical considerations inevitably to be considered — on the whole — again thanking you —" More and more hastily, as he neared the end, Vaughan read, almost with a feeling of physical disgust. Then he tossed the letter on his desk, and stood, with folded arms, looking out once more into the silent street, where the shadows were beginning to fall deeper and deeper, merging gradually into the dusk of twilight. At last he spoke. "I wouldn't care," he said, "if it was bad work; if it was work that I'd slighted; if it was work I'd done in a hurry, letting a word and a phrase go when I knew that somewhere, if I hunted long enough, I could find the one that really fitted. But it isn't like that. I can't reproach myself. It's been three years of the best I've got in me. Everything in the world I know of style, every bit of incident I wanted, every turn and twist of character. It isn't vanity; it isn't conceit; I don't care *who* wrote the book; it's good, and I know it's good; and yet to have them, one after the other —"

Practical, prosaic, monotonous, boomed the supper gong. With a sorry laugh Vaughan turned from the window, and then paused, irresolute. Must he go down again, as he had done so many times before; to compare himself, as he knew that in his present mood he so inevitably must, to his fellow lodgers around the well-worn board. The clerk in the down-town bank, the dapper young shoe salesman, the would-be humorist who made no secret of the fact that he was "pulling down" fifty a week out of his "knock 'em silly" insect powder, the old graybeard who tottered away each morning to haunt the reading-room of the public library, staying there the livelong day until he tottered home again at night — look at it as he would, one fact remained: these men, all of them, however much he might see in them to criticize, were, each in his way, successful men. Each, in his turn, to do them full justice, had stepped up at the sound of the bell, had wrestled his fall with the practical world, and had come out on top. And he, as the world judges success, had failed and failed, and now had failed once more. A money getter, it seemed, he would never be. Never before had his inability to make and lay away the dollars struck him with such tantalizing force. What good was he in the world, he asked himself, and with a sudden envy for every plain, practical, plodding man who was doing his daily round in the treadmill for his appointed wage, he felt himself to be an idle dreamer, absolutely unfitted for battle with the sane and commonplace world in which he lived; and with a savage fluency of bitter self disgust of which he was for ever after ashamed, he cursed himself, and his art, tore the letter vengefully into little pieces, slammed the door behind him, and went grimly down to his waiting supper.

It was ten o'clock the next morning, when, no whit less discouraged and sick at heart, he contrived to gain an audience with Henry Carleton. Even the great man's unfailing affability, this morning, it seemed, even kindlier and more pronounced than ever, for once failed to awaken in Vaughan's downcast face any semblance of an answering gleam. "Bad news, Mr. Carleton," he said, briefly, "it's been rejected again."

Carleton's face clouded with ready sympathy.

"Why, my dear boy," he cried, "I am sorry indeed. That is a shame. I had trusted so much that this time you would be successful. Indeed, I had almost in a way begun to feel as if your success were mine. I can't begin to tell you how sorry I am."

Gloomily Vaughan nodded assent. "It does make things bad," he said. "I hoped so much. And now I'm as far from Rose as ever."

Carleton cleared his throat. "My dear Vaughan," he said, "since you've chanced to mention the subject, I believe I ought to tell you that I've been thinking a great deal of late — as is only natural — about the position you and Rose are in. You know, of course, that I desire only her happiness, and yours, too. You know that. You believe that, I'm confident. Do you not, my boy?"

Vaughan, although not altogether without a vague feeling of uneasiness, hastened to assent to this self-evident proposition, and Carleton at once went on.

"Now then, my only feeling in the whole matter is this. You're neither of you really happy now; not in the least. Long engagements, as a rule, never are provocative of much happiness. And of course, as we've said before, you wouldn't want to get married, and have me support you. No, no, I'm sure you wouldn't wish that; no, of course you wouldn't —" he spoke a little hastily, himself answering the question he had appeared to ask —"and so," he continued, "I have been wondering, wouldn't it be better — fairer, perhaps, to Rose — not to see her so much for a while. She's very young, you know. And if it gets to be understood that you two are practically engaged, she's cut off from a great deal of pleasure which a young girl at her age ought rightfully to enjoy. So why won't it be best for you to go back in earnest to your work — try as you've never tried before — and I know that ultimately you'll succeed. I envy you your ability, Arthur; I envy you your choice of a profession; and I know that success is only a matter of time — only a matter of time —" he repeated a little dreamily. "But you can't do it and have all this strain of a long love affair at the same time. I know how that distracts one; it would scarcely be worthy the name of love if it were otherwise. I remember —"

He sat silent for a moment, as if lost in the contemplation of the past; and then suddenly coming to the present again, continued, in a far brisker and more practical tone, "And so, about Rose — remember, I'm not attempting to dictate, I'm not urging it, even; I'm only suggesting to your own sense of what is fairest and in the end best for both of you, how it would be if perhaps you didn't see her for a time. How does it seem to you, Arthur? I want you to be perfectly frank with me, of course, just as I have been with you."

To some men, possessing the defects of their virtues, any appeal to their spirit of fairness transforms their strongest into their weakest side. Vaughan nodded miserably. "Perhaps," he said, a little faintly, "you're right. I hadn't thought of it in just that way before. But I want to do what's best for Rose, of course. And I'll own up that having the book rejected this last time has taken all the confidence out of me. Perhaps you're right. Perhaps I'm not being fair to her."

"I'm very glad," Carleton said cordially, "that you take such a sensible view of it. It isn't the easiest thing for a man in your position to do; I appreciate that. And of course we have one other thing to consider. It's hardly probable that Rose is going to take the same view of all this that we do — at least, not with any great enthusiasm. She's very fond of you, Vaughan, as is only right and natural. But all women in the world, where their lovers are concerned, are hopelessly and by nature entirely selfish and jealous, to a degree, of anything that keeps the man in the case away from them, jealous even of so worthy a thing as a man's life work; and a man's life work, after all, as you must realize now as perhaps never before, is a terribly important thing. So you will have to do your best to try to make her see the common-sense side of all this. And that you'll do, I'm sure."

To Vaughan it appeared as if he found himself suddenly involved, really against his will; arrayed on the same side with Henry Carleton to fight the battle of stern common sense, without having any very clear idea of how he had happened to get there. " Do you mean," he asked, " that you think I ought not to see her at all? "

Henry Carleton's success had been too great to permit of the slightest risk of endangering it. " Oh, by no means," he made haste to answer. " Run out and see her whenever you feel like it — say once a month or so. But to come as an ordinary friend, and not as an accepted suitor, I think perhaps would be the wiser way. That commends itself to you also, I have no doubt."

Vaughan's expression was that of a man to whom nothing now mattered. " Oh, yes," he answered wearily, " that commends itself to me. That strikes me as very sensible indeed."

The complete discouragement in his tone caused Carleton to eye him keenly. " One other thing," he said, hastening to shift the topic with unusual abruptness, " about the book. I don't want you to feel in the least cast down. We'll find a publisher yet; I'm confident of it. And this next time, let's start fair and square. Give me the manuscript, and let me try negotiations in my own way. I think I may almost promise that you'll not find yourself disappointed."

The expression on Vaughan's face did not seem to indicate that he by any means shared Carleton's confidence. " We can't do worse," he said, perhaps a little ungraciously. " If you think there's any good in going ahead, why, all right. My confidence is gone. I'll send the great work over to you to-morrow; and you can send it off on its travels again, or burn it. I don't know which would be the more sensible of the two."

Henry Carleton shook his head reprovingly. " Oh, come now," he protested, " don't insult yourself that way. We'll show them yet." He extended a benevolent hand as he spoke. Some one had once described Carleton's method of getting rid of his callers as imperceptible, but inevitable. " And run out and see Rose soon," he added kindly, " have a good long talk with her, and fully explain your side of the case. She won't fail to grasp it, I'm sure. She's nobody's fool, if her own father does say so."

Somehow Vaughan found himself outside the office, outside the building itself, walking along the street in a kind of maze, before his ordinary powers of intellect again asserted themselves. Curiously enough, for one who had agreed so readily and so entirely with everything that Henry Carleton had proposed, he now appeared to be actuated by a certain feeling of resentment against that worthiest of men. "Confound him," he muttered disrespectfully. "How on earth does he manage it? He can turn me around like a weathercock. I never make such a fool of myself as I do when I talk with him. I never saw such a man. I can think of twenty things now that I might have said, but when I needed them, I'll be hanged if I could lay a finger on *one*. And if I had, I don't doubt but what the next minute he'd have shown me where I was wrong. He's always right. That's the puzzle about him. He's so fair and just about things; you can't dispute him; and yet, for all it seems like such an idiotic thing to say, he's right, and you know all the time he's wrong. Confound the man. He's one too many for me."

His talk with Rose came an evening or so later on the broad piazza at The Birches. For half an hour Vaughan had sought vainly to bring himself to make a beginning, with his attention in the meantime miserably distracted from all that Rose Carleton had to say, finding it indeed hard to assent with any great degree of pleasure to plans for a future which he now felt was for ever barred to him. So noticeable and so unlike himself did his inattention finally become that the girl stopped short in something she was saying to turn his face toward hers, scrutinizing it as though she sought to read the trouble there. "What's gone wrong, Arthur?" she asked, "nothing that I've done to displease you?"

Vaughan's answer to the latter part of the question was not made in words. And then, as he again raised his head, at last he made his explanation. "It's this, dear," he said. "I happened to go in to see your father the other day about the book — to bother him with more bad news — and he began to talk, apropos of that, about ourselves. He was very pleasant — very fair — I must acknowledge that — but — he thinks that for a man with no more prospects than I have, that I have no right to hold you to anything like an engagement; that it isn't fair to you; and all that. I suppose, though he was too polite to put it in just that way, the implication would be that I ought never to have spoken to you at all. And so — I didn't see, for the life of me, just what there was for me to say. He asked me if I didn't agree with him — it was an awkward question, sort of a 'you'll be damned if you don't; you'll be damned if you do' sort of affair — and between being a fool or appearing to be a knave, I chose the rôle that seems to come so easily to me always; I chose to be the fool, and stammered out that I supposed I did. And now I don't know what to do; in a way I've given him my word not to visit you as if we were engaged; in a way it seems as if he were right, too; and yet —" the unfinished sentence was eloquent of all his doubt and misery.

He might have been prepared for almost any answer other than the girl's laugh of real amusement. And on the instant, wrought up and perplexed as he was, the surprise of it made him draw himself up with offended dignity. Reading his mood with all a woman's skill, the girl drew closer to him, and raised her face to his. "Kiss me," she cried imperiously, and when, with a rather ill-grace, he had complied, "There," she said, "that's better; don't imagine you can get rid of me as easily as you think. My affections aren't to be trifled with like that, I'll have you know."

Half vexed still, yet with a feeling of immense relief, he gazed at her with a certain pathos of indecision. "Then you don't think —" he began.

She broke in upon him. "My dear," she said, "I'm going to lecture you. I might tell you, of course, if I wanted to, that you were perfection, possessing no faults whatever; but it wouldn't be true. You've got them, just as everybody else in the world has. And your greatest fault of all is lack of confidence in yourself. You're too willing to take everybody else's opinion in place of your own. That's what you've done now. And on the other hand, my father, who's one of the best men that ever lived, I believe — every daughter has that privilege of belief about her father — my father isn't without his faults, either. And his besetting one is to think that because he's made a success of so many things, that that gives him a sort of divine right to run everybody else's affairs for them, too. In just one word, speaking of course with the greatest respect, he's a good deal of an autocrat. And so, when I laughed just now, it was because I was thinking, when it came to an argument, what possible chance you, with your modesty, could have had against him, with all his certainty of being right. And the funny thing — the thing neither of you seemed to think of —" she added audaciously, " is that I've got very distinct ideas of my own on most subjects, and especially about the merits of the man I'm going to marry. Oh, Arthur, please — now it's all rumpled — well, anything's better than having you with that ' farewell-for-ever ' look on your face. So, you see, I refuse to release you; with the greatest respect, as I say, for my father's judgment on almost every other subject under the sun."

Vaughan, as he properly should have been, appeared vastly cheered. He drew a long breath; then as quickly again looked troubled. " But about coming out here," he objected. " I don't want to be a sneak. And I've agreed not to come; only once a month, that is, and I believe," he added a little ruefully, " I undertook the contract of persuading you to assent to the change of program. So now there are new difficulties. If I report your insubordination, not to say rebellion, to your father, there'll be trouble all around, and if I lie about it, and report entire success, your father will be delighted, but he'll be the only one. You're so clever, I guess I'll have to leave things to you. You're bound to get me into trouble; you've got to get me out again."

" Now," the girl returned, " you're showing your true brilliancy. And from what I know of my father, I think we will — what's the word they use in the melodramas — dissemble. That's it. We'll dissemble. You just tell my father that you talked with me, and that I very sensibly agreed with him. That will put his mind at rest. Poor father. He has so many things he's busy about I should never forgive myself if I caused him one worry more. Yes, I think that will be very satisfactory. The best way for every one."

Vaughan did not appear greatly to relish her plans. "Satisfactory," he echoed. "Seeing you once a month. Well, if you think that's clever, I must say —"

"Seeing you *here,*" the girl interrupted. "There's a vast difference in that. This isn't the only place in the world. Really, Arthur, for a young man of your inventiveness —"

She paused, her eyes alight with tender merriment. At last he seemed to comprehend. "Oh, yes," he nodded, "I see. In town, I suppose, but then there's always somebody sees you, and then your father hears about it —"

"Stupid," she flashed at him. "Aren't there better places than walking down the Avenue, or going around to picture galleries? What's the fun in that? Isn't there a river not so far away? Aren't there woods all about us romantic enough even for you? That's all easy to arrange. It'll be quite fun working it all out. But the main thing to manage, Arthur —" her tone suddenly altered — "is that nothing shall ever come between us. To try to keep apart two people who really love each other as we do, just because of anything like money, or fame, why, really, my dear, that's nothing short of a crime."

He nodded, yet a little grimly. "In theory, dear, you're quite right," he answered. "But how about the practice? Money! Fame! We can talk about them all we choose as little things, when we haven't them, and the grapes, perhaps, are a little sour, but how they count, after all. Poor Love! Love wasn't made for a practical world. His bow and arrow is effectual enough, when there's no fiercer game abroad than the hearts of girls and boys, but how can he fight against real warriors — shields of gold and trumpets of brass.

Poor Love! Who could blame him for running away?"

She took his hand with a gesture almost maternal. "My dear, my dear," she said, "you mustn't talk like that. It's sacrilege, almost. If he were the true god of love, he wouldn't fly. And his darts would pierce the golden shield, and put the trumpets to rout. You, Arthur, a lover of all things beautiful, to dream of deserting, of arraying yourself on the side of Mammon."

She spoke lightly, but with a real meaning behind her words. He seemed, however, to be unconvinced, for when he replied it was with a bitterness that startled her. "I don't care," he said, "I've missed it somehow. I've made an awful failure of things. Look at me! Making no bluffs, as lots of men do, keeping back nothing, I'm earning a little over a thousand dollars a year. And other men — classmates — yes, confound it, and men who came out of college five years later than I did — and worse than that, men who never went to college at all — they can make money; good money, lots of them; a few, big money, even; and here I am, trying to publish a book that never will be published; and which, if it should be, nobody'd ever read. Oh, the world's pretty near right, after all; nearer right than we think; I'm labeled at just about my face value: a thousand dollars a year."

She laid her hand lightly on his lips. "No, no," she cried, "you don't understand. You've been brooding over this so long you've lost all sense of proportion between money and other things. I'll tell you what I think. I think making money's only a knack. I believe some men are born with it, and others aren't. Look at the men who start with a pack of rags on their back, and die worth millions. It's in them; it's no credit to them; maybe the reverse. No one man can be everything. Some men can build railroads, but I couldn't imagine you doing anything like that if you tried your honest best for a hundred years. No, my dear, because money seems to you to be the thing you need the most just now, you've been so envious of the men who are able to make it quickly that you've forgotten all that you have to be thankful for; something that very few men have granted to them at all, even a hundredth part of what you possess — and that's the precious perception of the artist; the power to see things which the ordinary man can never see. You'll succeed, I know you will, but even if you never should — by the world's standards, I mean — you ought never to repine. Read your Browning again, dear; even I can appreciate that. 'One who never turned his back but marched breast forward, never doubted clouds would break' — how can any man turn faint heart after that? The truth, dear, that's everything, after all."

Very humbly and very reverently he stooped and kissed her. "You're right, Rose," he said, "and I've been wrong. Forgive me. But you know yourself — sometimes it's hard; sometimes the world's standards grip you so that you can't keep to your own. But I've been wrong, and I admit it most humbly. You've a very wise little head on your shoulders, dear, and I thank you for setting me right. I won't go backsliding again in a hurry, I'll promise you."

There was a long silence. Then at last abruptly Vaughan spoke, "Rose," he said, "what you've just been saying has reminded me of something I wanted to ask you about. It's a hypothetical case, that a friend of mine put to me; simple enough, seemingly, yet hard for me to decide. What would you say to this? Suppose some friend of yours had done something for which there was no possible excuse; committed a crime, we'll say. Suppose you had it in your power to condemn him, by telling something that you knew, or, by keeping silent, could clear him for ever. What is your duty?"

The girl did not hesitate. "To tell what I know, friend or no friend," she answered.

Vaughan nodded. "That's what I supposed you'd say," he rejoined. "Now go a step further. Suppose it were I that had done the wrong. Would you tell then?"

The girl's answer came as direct as before. "You," she cried, "never; never in the world. I couldn't. Any one but you."

Vaughan's laugh had little of mirth in it. "And yet," he said, "if we are worshippers of the truth, which it is so easy to prate of and so hard to live, where is the logical distinction? Why should a little matter of personal liking for anybody stand in your way?"

The girl was silent. Then, unwillingly enough, "No, I suppose you're right," she said. "But it wouldn't be logic that would decide me. I *couldn't* expose you, that would be all. I'd acknowledge to myself the wrong I was doing, but I'd go ahead with it just the same. Perhaps that's because I'm a woman, and trust too much to intuition. If I were a man, I don't know. As you say, there's no question of the real right and wrong of it. One should speak, regardless of everything else. And making it a question of degree does put the whole thing in a terribly unsatisfactory light. A stranger I wouldn't hesitate about. You, I could never betray, though I knew I was doing wrong. Midway between, all grades of hatred, liking, love. No, it isn't satisfactory, is it? Oh, I don't know how to answer, Arthur. But we've only a few minutes left, dear. Let's not spoil it by being too grave. I'm glad that it's only a hypothetical question, at any rate. Not an actual one."

"Yes," Vaughan answered, "I'm glad too."

CHAPTER XIV

THE QUEST OF TRUTH

"And broader and brighter
The Gleam flying onward,
Wed to the melody,
Sang thro' the world;
* * *
After it, follow it,
Follow the Gleam."

Tennyson.

IT was nine o'clock on a cold, bleak evening in late December. A bitter, stinging, northwest wind raged unopposed up and down the length of the passive, shivering, all but deserted Avenue; buffeting the few unfortunate stragglers still out-of-doors, making shrill music among the chimney-tops, shouting and storming at fast-closed doors, and tracing every moment deeper and deeper its bold, yet delicate design on rattling window and frost-embroidered pane.

A pleasant thing, indeed, on this wild night, to turn indoors to some place where comfort lay; and for a moment to glance at the little room where Professor Emerson sat alone among his books, reading peacefully, and with such absorption, that to the tumult without he paid no heed. His venerable, white-bearded figure lay for the greater part almost wholly in shadow, and the light of the study lamp, shining full upon his features, brought out in vivid contrast the strong and well-etched outline of his face. It was a face noble and sensitive, with a certain clear-cut delicacy of line; pale as if hewn from the very marble, and yet as if lighted by the cold, clear fire of the spirit within, so fine, so keen, so intellectual still, that one must needs peer more closely to discover the network of tiny, almost imperceptible wrinkles; one must needs note more carefully the trembling of the thin, blue-veined hand that held the book, to realize that the professor, alert and active for so many long years, was but a professor emeritus now; and that one was gazing on a man feeble, infirm and old.

Peacefully he sat there, and indeed, in that quiet room, on an ear far quicker and readier than his own the fury of the gale would scarce have struck disturbingly. Blow the wind as it might around the casement, rug and curtain and tapestry laughed it to scorn; whistle as it would down the chimney, the mounting warmth of the crackling flame met and repulsed it at every turn. Verily the little room, restful and serene, the scholar's orderly abode, seemed a sanctuary alike from the storms of nature and from the storms of the world.

Presently, through the stillness of the house, a bell pealed sharply. To the old man, however, it must have sounded but faintly, for at once, with but a momentary half glance upward from his book, he fell to reading again. Nor was his servant's knock on the study door enough. It was only when he had entered the room, and had approached respectfully almost to within arm's length, that the professor at last gave heed. "Mr. Vaughan, sir," said the man, "wishes to know if you could see him for a little while."

At once the old scholar seemed to rouse himself. Closing his book, he laid it aside. "Mr. Vaughan," he repeated, "why, yes indeed. Ask him to step right up, please," and a moment later footsteps sounded in the hall outside, and Arthur Vaughan came quickly into the room.

Greetings exchanged, the old man beamed benevolently across the fire at his former pupil. "This is very kind of you, Arthur," he said, "I'm always glad to see any of my old boys; and I don't get the chance so often now. And what is it to-night? Something you wished to ask me about, or did you just drop in for a chat?"

Vaughan hesitated for a moment before replying. "A little of both, Professor," he said at length. "I wanted to see how you were, for one thing; and for another, I had something on my mind that I wanted to get your opinion on. I always used to come to you in college, when things bothered me, and I thought I'd do the same now. This is a hypothetical case — a question of conduct — and one of the puzzling ones that seem to have right on both sides."

Instantly the old man's interest was awakened. "A question of conduct," he repeated, "by all means let me hear it, Arthur. There's nothing more interesting than that, ever. Matthew Arnold, you know —'conduct three-fourths of life.' Very likely so, of course, and yet I always wondered just how he fixed it with such exactness. Why not five-eighths, I used to wonder, or seven-eighths; why just the seventy-five per cent. He thought himself, as I remember it, that he'd pitched it low, and Stevenson, on the other hand, considered it high. Well, that was Arnold, all over. A little arbitrary in such things; a little given to catch-words, perhaps; black letter, you know; and yet, for all that, a great critic, a great debater, and to my thinking, a great poet as well. Well, well, there I go rambling again. This old head-piece, I'm beginning to think, Arthur, is getting pretty shaky now. Well, to come back to the point. A question of conduct; that's it, isn't it?"

Vaughan smiled. "To tell the truth, Professor," he answered, "if I were to consult my own pleasure, I'd rather try to keep you rambling, as you call it, than to come down to any dry question of right and wrong. But as long as I have this on my mind, I suppose I'd better get down to business, and save the ramble for another time. This is the case, Professor. Suppose a man has a friend — not a mere acquaintance, you understand — but one of those rare things, a real friend, for whom he would do almost anything under heaven, if it would help him in any way. And then suppose that suddenly, absolutely by chance, he comes upon the knowledge that this friend has committed a crime — a crime so dastardly that he can atone for it only with his life. No one else in the whole world —" for just an instant he stopped, then with a shrug of his shoulders, went on. "Yes, we'll let it go at that, I think. No one else in the whole world knows the facts. He holds his friend's life practically in his hands. And so — the question comes. Shall he turn informer? What is his duty? Shall he treat his friend as if he were some ordinary criminal whom he had never seen — should be at all eagerness to drag him before the bar of justice, and have him pay the penalty of his crime? Or has friendship some claim? Has he the right to stand aside, shoulders shrugged, mouth tightly closed?

Has he the right to say, 'No business of mine. Let the man settle it with his conscience and his God?' Has he a choice? Or is he bound to step forward? Is he dragged into the cursed business against his will? Can he keep silence, or must he speak?"

He stopped abruptly. There was a silence, a silence so long that Vaughan was beginning to wonder whether or not the old man's brain had fully grasped his words. But when at last the professor spoke, it was evident that the pause had been given only to careful thought; that no detail of the problem had been lost on him. "Is any one else, Arthur," he asked, "supposed to be involved? Or is it simply the case of the man himself? Are there others to be considered, or does he stand alone, confronted with the deed he has done?"

Vaughan's answering laugh had nothing of mirth in it. "Any one else," he echoed, "I should say so. Relatives; friends; a woman's heart, perhaps, to be broken. And the man who is confronted with the problem — it may mean loss of his own happiness as well. And a name, too; a family name that's been maintained with honor for centuries, almost, one might say. That's to be dragged in the dust, if it all becomes known. Is any one else involved?" He laughed again.

There was a pause before the professor spoke, and then, "Could the man make atonement, Arthur?" he asked.

Vaughan's tone, when he answered, was low and sad. "Never," he replied, "never in a million years. It is a crime where mankind seek to do justice, but where really there is no possible atonement. The crime is the taking of the life of a fellow-man."

The old man slowly nodded. "And he refuses to come forward?" he asked.

"He refuses to come forward," Vaughan answered, "though of his motives, perhaps it is hardly fair to pretend to judge. Still, strictly speaking, I suppose that scarcely alters the case. Whatever his idea in keeping silent, in any event he does so."

"And of his guilt," said the professor, "I understand you to make no question. That, as I understand it, is one of the fixed hypotheses of the problem, and not open to discussion."

Vaughan inclined his head. "Exactly," he returned. "Of his guilt, unfortunately, there is no question. That we may regard as fixed."

Long and earnestly the old man pondered. "There is a difficulty, of course," he said, at length. "Under ordinary circumstances, or rather, perhaps, I should say, under extraordinary circumstances, under the hypothesis, I mean, that there existed in all the world only the murdered man, the criminal, yourself, and the tribunal of justice, then I suppose the case would be tolerably clear. I suppose no sophistry could convince us that the incidental fact of a personal friendship should in reality make the slightest difference as to what your duty would be. But then there enters the complication of which you speak — the rights of the other parties involved. As to whether there were others concerned, my question was almost a needless precaution. Of course there are. No man, even the lowest, ever lives to himself alone. Consciously or unconsciously, he has to influence some one about him, for good or evil, as the case may be. But considering everything, even the sorrow and misfortune that must result from it, I am of opinion, Arthur, that the man should speak. It would be hard, of course; terribly hard; but life *is* hard. And of the ultimate standard of right and wrong, we may scarcely hope to judge. All that we may hope to do is to act up to the truth as we see it. And here, Arthur, I believe the duty is plain. To what the man has seen he must bear witness, at whatever cost. That way lies right, and to follow the easier, the more human course, and to keep silence, that way lies wrong."

Vaughan had sat listening with downcast eyes. In spite of himself, he could not raise them to meet the professor's glance, though within him his mind, mutinous, rebelled. "But doesn't friendship count?" he said at last. "Doesn't loyalty go for anything? Can a man play the traitor, as you would have him do, and not be branded false for all eternity?"

The professor's gaze, serene and calm, never for an instant faltered. "Arthur," he said, "you don't believe that — not a word of it. You're trying to make good soldiers enlist in a bad cause. Friendship, loyalty; yes, they are fine things; scarce anything finer, perhaps; but where the true allegiance of these fine things belongs — that it is the truth that transcends all else — that, Arthur, you know, in your inmost heart, as well as I."

Vaughan sat silent, with clouded brow. And then, as the pause lengthened, he made another effort still. "But, Professor, even if the individual amounts to little, isn't there the further question of the other matter of which I have spoken — the question of an honored family name. That, at least, Professor, is no small thing. To bring a stain upon it, without the most absolute necessity for so doing, doesn't it seem, in a way, like seeking to debase the currency? A name, graced by generations of those who have borne it worthily, passes always current for patriotism, integrity, honesty; the name becomes of itself a force for the public good. And now, suddenly debase that name — smirch and mar it — and you have struck a blow at the very foundation of things; you shake the confidence of the people at large in something which they had come to regard as one of the unquestioned bulwarks of the city and the state. Isn't that something to be well considered? Should not the man see to it, that in righting, or trying to right, a wrong for which he is not responsible, he does not go too far, and instead of reparation, leave behind him, in its place, a scar — a blot — that even time can not erase. Isn't that the solution, sir? Should not the man keep still?"

For a time the old man sat silent, weighing Vaughan's words well, before he at length made answer. "That is an argument, Arthur," he replied, "a plausible argument; yet hardly, I should say, sound. Debasing the currency is an excellent figure, yet there is a currency as much higher than that of family names, as gold outvalues copper. And to seek to keep the copper inviolate, while at the same time forced to debase the real currency — the standard gold — would that be the path of wisdom? Names, you say; great names; but they seem such a small thing in the wide universe itself; a name; a great name; a generation of great names; all but the tiniest dust motes shimmering across the sunbeam which gives them all the luster they may claim. Is the dust speck of reputation worth saving, if its rescue means the shutting out of the sunbeam — Truth?"

In his turn Vaughan sat silent, seeking vainly for words — thoughts — arguments — that would not come. At length he rose, his hands clenched, the struggle going on within him showing in every line of his sensitive face. "I don't know; I don't know;" he cried, "I have to think it out myself. But I thank you, Professor, for your kindness; I hope I haven't tired you," and taking the old man's hand in farewell, he made his way hurriedly out of the room.

CHAPTER XV

MURDER WILL OUT

> "Murder, though it have no tongue, will speak
> With most miraculous organ."
>
> *Shakespeare.*

HENRY CARLETON and his daughter sat in the library at The Birches, Carleton writing at the long table, Rose, with easy chair drawn up in front of the fire, busied with her embroidery. Presently Henry Carleton laid aside his pen, and rising, walked over to the bookcase; where he found the volume and verified the quotation which he sought; then, with a smile of satisfaction, he walked back to the table again, and for an instant stood there, glancing down contentedly at the orderly arrangement of papers and documents now completed and laid aside, awaiting the morrow.

The expression of his face was serene and benevolent. His very attitude — even, indeed, something about the atmosphere of the room itself — breathed of the man at peace with himself and with the world. And such a man, at the moment, in very truth Henry Carleton was, and with every reason therefor besides. The routine of his well-ordered day was drawing to a close. From the dinner table he had gone direct to his evening paper — from the paper to his desk. The little white heap of envelopes that stood ready for the morrow's mailing bore witness to his labors there. The big check book at their side was closed — modestly and becomingly closed — but if the observer's eye had been able to penetrate the cover, and for a moment to look at the stubs within, his admiration for Henry Carleton could but have been increased by what he would there have seen. One check, made payable to the Cripples' Home, was for five hundred dollars; there were a half dozen more, payable to other charities, for a hundred each; there was one for twenty-five drawn to the order of a poor veteran in Eversley village. Surely witnesses better than these no man could well desire. What wonder that Henry Carleton was content.

And now, with business out of the way, with his household and his private affairs all in order, this man of so many talents and virtues had turned to his pet avocation — literature — and was forging busily ahead on his scholarly essay, *Character Drawing in the Early English Novel.* Glancing over what he had written, at once he spoke aloud, half to his daughter, half — the most important half — to himself. This thinking aloud over his literary work was a favorite method with him. He liked to get Rose's ideas and criticisms — sometimes, to his surprise, they appeared upon reflection to contain much of good sense — and apart from this, he believed that it was in this way he could pass the fairest and the most searching judgment upon his labors. And after all, the question of benefit apart, the sound of his own voice was in nowise distasteful to him. Nor could he well be blamed. It was a pleasant voice and well-modulated, and through its medium he liked to think around his subject, to get the swing and cadence of each varying phrase, before at length he came to make his last "fair copy," and thus to transmit his ideas to paper in final form.

"'Sir Charles Grandison,' Rose," he read, "'is beyond question most skilfully drawn, with all the author's great command of those quiet little strokes and touches, one superimposed on the other, which at last give us the portrait of the man, standing forth from the canvas in all the seeming reality of flesh and blood.' How does that strike you, Rose?"

The girl wrinkled her pretty forehead. "Well, father," she answered, a little dubiously, "for one thing, I don't know that I think it's quite true. I always thought Sir Charles was a terrible prig; horribly self-satisfied and altogether too much taken up with marveling at his own virtues. I don't believe, you know, that a man like Sir Charles ever could assume for any one 'the seeming reality of flesh and blood.' 'The seeming reality of a lay figure,' I think, would be about the nearest phrase one could properly use."

Henry Carleton hastened to dissent. "No, no, my dear," he returned, "you're quite wrong. Sir Charles wasn't perfect. Richardson was far too clever to fall into that error. Sir Charles had his faults, and the author in his concluding note takes special pains to draw attention to them. He had his faults, but then his virtues so far outweighed them that they sank into insignificance. Then there was Lovelace, whose faults were so pronounced, and who had such a lack of any redeeming virtues, that he is at once to be condemned as a character thoroughly immoral, serviceable ethically only to point the awful example of talents misspent and energies abused. And midway between the two is Mr. B., who also had his failings, but who finally atoned for them by his condescension in marrying Pamela. The trio, I think, point the way to the author's whole philosophy of life. We have our faults, even the best of us. We can't help them. But on the other hand, by constant endeavor, we can do so much good that in the end we counterbalance the evil we do, and so to speak obliterate it altogether. Very good, I think, and very sound. An interesting title for a little essay, *The Balance,* don't you think so, Rose?"

The girl looked doubtful. "Why, no," she answered, "to tell the truth, I don't. I should think that was a pretty dangerous doctrine. Good and evil — debit and credit. I should think it was a very grave question whether any amount of good could ever really balance one conscious evil act. Take Mr. B., whom you've just quoted, for example. I could never, in reading that book, think of him as anything but a great, hulking, overbearing, arrogant animal, and the shameful way in which he treated poor Sally Goodwin is a case right in point — that was something no man could ever atone for, even by a series of the finest deeds in the world. No, father, I think, if I were you, I shouldn't try to justify a theory like that. I'm afraid it isn't sound."

Henry Carleton frowned. "Nonsense," he cried, for him a little irritably, "it's perfectly sound. I could give you a hundred examples. 'Take him for all in all,' as Shakespeare phrases it;

that's what I mean. Some evil has to be done with the good, unless we're going back to pillories and hermitages, to keep ourselves unspotted from the world. And in these days common sense forbids that. Your view is entirely unreasonable, Rose."

The girl seemed somewhat surprised at his unusual heat. With a little laugh she rolled up her embroidery, quitted the easy chair, and coming over to him, kissed him obediently on the cheek. "Well, don't mind me, father," she said affectionately, "if you don't want my foolish ideas, you shouldn't ask for them. One thing's sure; if your theory is right, you can do about anything you want to now. Rob a bank — or commit any dreadful crime you choose. Your balance must be so large you couldn't overdraw it if you tried."

Carleton laughed. "Well, perhaps that is rather a *reductio ad absurdum*," he answered. "In any event, I don't think I'll experiment in the way you mention. You're not going up-stairs already, are you, Rose?"

She nodded. "Yes, if you don't mind," she replied, "I'm a little tired this evening. Good night.

Don't work too hard over your writing now. You never rest. I never saw such a man."

Left alone, Carleton returned to his essay, but not with the concentration he had before displayed. A sudden restlessness seemed to have come over him. Once or twice he ceased his work to consult his watch, and finally stopped, rose hastily, and walked over to the window, where he stood gazing aimlessly out into the night; then, with a sigh, turned slowly, almost, one would have said, reluctantly, again to his task.

For perhaps five minutes he kept manfully at work. Then once again his attention seemed to wander; slowly and still more slowly moved the unwilling pen, and finally, with a sudden impatient gesture, he laid it down, flung himself back in his chair, and sat there motionless, yet not with the air of one who has comfortably finished the task he has in hand, but rather as if debating within himself, between two possible courses of action, which one at last to choose.

If such, indeed, was the case, the decision was not to lie with him. There came a knock at the door. "Come in," he said quickly, and the butler, Helmar's friend of old, a little thinner, a little grayer, a little more imperturbable than ever, entered softly, approaching close to his master's elbow before he delivered himself of his message. "Mr. Vaughan, sir," he announced with slow deliberation, "in the reception-room. He wishes to know, sir, if without inconvenience to yourself you could give him a few moments."

Henry Carleton looked a little surprised, perhaps also a little annoyed. "To see *me*," he said, "you're sure, Burton, that it wasn't Miss Rose he asked for?"

The butler's manner was one verging on gentle reproof. Within his domain he did not allow himself the luxury of making mistakes. "Quite sure, sir," he answered. His tone, though respectful, did not admit of further questioning upon the point. Henry Carleton sighed, and appeared to rouse himself. "Why, of course," he said, "tell him I'll be down at once; or no," he added, "please, Burton, tell him to come up here instead."

The butler, inclining his head, withdrew. Then, a moment or two later, the sound of ascending footsteps, and Vaughan entered the room. At once something in his appearance struck Henry Carleton as far out of the ordinary. "Why, my dear boy," he cried, "you look worried to death. What's gone wrong? No more bad news from the book?"

Vaughan silently shook his head. He was indeed looking miserably, and when he took a chair, he sat bolt upright on its edge, leaning forward nervously when he spoke. "No," he said, "it's worse than that, Mr. Carleton; a whole lot worse. It's something that's been troubling me for a long time now, until finally I've made up my mind that the only thing for me to do is to come straight to you with it, and tell you the whole story. And that's why I'm here."

At once Carleton shoved books and papers aside, as if the better to prepare himself for proper attention to Vaughan's words. He looked at his visitor with an air of friendly concern. "Anything that I can do —" he murmured. "You know, of course, that you may count on me. Anything in my power —"

Vaughan nodded abruptly. "Thank you," he said hastily and a little grimly, "it's not a favor that I've come for. I'm going to do you a bad turn, I'm afraid. Going to do everybody a bad turn, as far as that goes. But it can't be helped. I've got to go ahead, and that's all there is to it."

Henry Carleton eyed him narrowly, but without speaking, and Vaughan, looking up, as if eager to have his task over, with sudden resolve, began. "It's about Satterlee," he said, "you remember how things happened out here that night, of course. I guess we all do. Jack went up-stairs to bed, you remember, and you and Cummings went off to play billiards. I was on the piazza with Rose, and stayed there until you came down to tell her that it was getting late. Then, after she went up-stairs, you told me that you were going for a short walk, and I said I believed I'd go to my room. Well, I didn't. I don't know why. I started to go in, and then — the night was so fine; I had so much that was pleasant to think about — somehow I couldn't stand the idea of going into the house, and instead I took a stroll around the grounds."

He stopped for a moment. Henry Carleton, gazing intently at him, gave no sign from his expression that he was experiencing any emotion beyond that of the keenest interest and attention. Only his eyes, in the shadow, had lost their customary benevolent expression, narrowing until their look was keen, alert; the look of a man put quickly on his guard. And as Vaughan still kept silence, it chanced that Carleton was the first again to speak. "Well," he queried impatiently, "and what then?"

Vaughan drew a quick breath. "This," he cried hastily, almost recklessly, "this. I walked down toward Satterlee's cottage, and I saw what happened there. Satterlee didn't fall from any rock. He was murdered. And I saw it all."

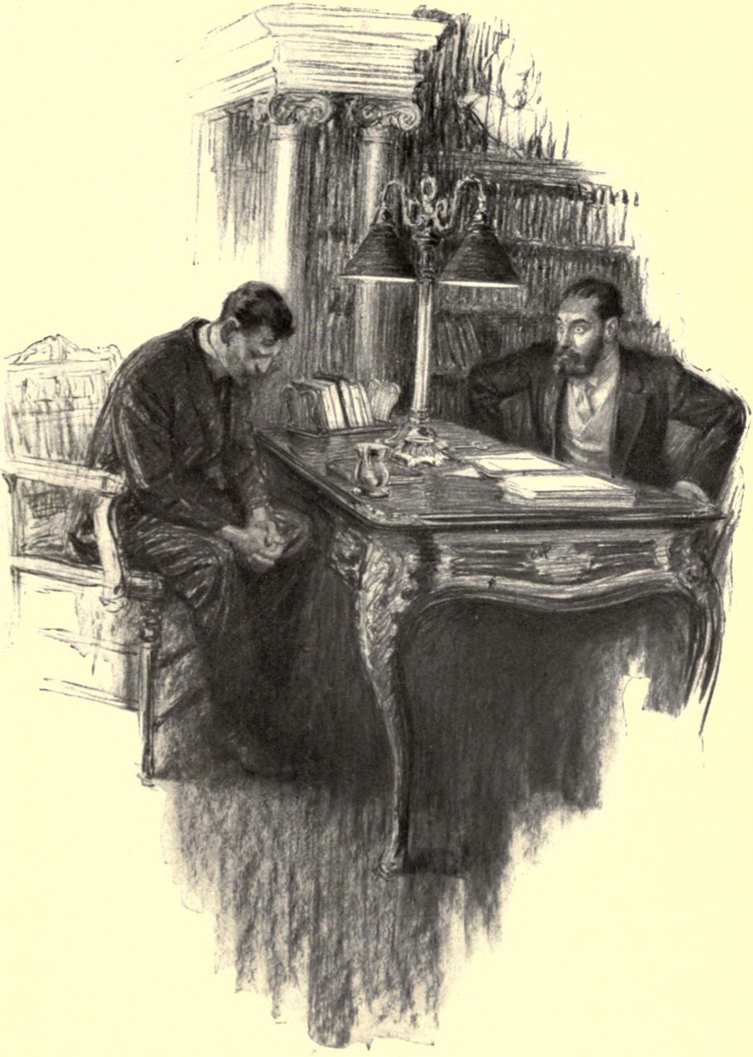
Henry Carleton did not start. There was no cry of surprise, no single word, even. Only, as Vaughan had finished, on a sudden his eyes dilated strangely; his lips parted a trifle; for a moment, without breathing, without animation, it seemed as if the man's whole being hung poised motionless, suspended. So great the surprise, so great the shock, that one, not knowing, might almost have believed himself to be looking upon the man who had done the deed. "Murdered?" he at last repeated dully, "You saw it? Murdered?"— there was a moment's silence, and then, all at once seeming to recover himself, he leaned forward in his chair. "By whom?" he cried sharply, with just a note of menace in his tone, "By whom?"

On Vaughan's part there was no further hesitation. He had gone too far for that. Yet his face was drawn and distorted with pain as in a tone so low that Carleton could scarcely hear, he uttered the single word, "Jack."

And this time the added shock was too great. Henry Carleton started visibly, the most intense emotion showing in every line of his face. "Jack?" he gasped, "Jack?"

In silence Vaughan bowed his head, hardly able to look on the anguish which his words had caused. "Jack," he muttered again, under his breath.

There was a silence, tense, pregnant. Once Vaughan, slowly raising his head, had started to speak, and Henry Carleton had instantly lifted a



Henry Carleton started visibly.—Page 292

hand to enjoin silence. "Wait a minute!" he commanded. Evidently he was striving to recollect. Then presently he spoke again. "Nonsense," he cried, "I remember perfectly now. That was the night that Jack said he felt tired; he went to his room early to smoke a pipe, and then turn in. Jack murder Satterlee! Why, nonsense, man! You're dreaming. You're not in your right mind. Jack and Satterlee were always good friends, and Mrs. Satterlee, too. No, no. Jack to murder any one is nonsensical enough; but Jack to murder Satterlee — impossible — simply impossible!"

Stubbornly Vaughan shook his head. "I wish to God it were," he answered, with deep feeling. "It sounds wild enough, I know, but it's true, for all that. Every word. And one thing you've just said —" he hesitated, and stopped, then unwillingly enough continued, "one thing, I'm afraid, goes a long ways toward explaining, and that is that Jack *was* such good friends with Mrs. Satterlee. I'm afraid that was the beginning of everything."

Carleton's face was pale, and his voice, when he spoke, was hoarse with emotion. "God, Vaughan," he said, "this is terrible," and then, with a quick return to his former manner, "no, no, I can't believe it yet. Tell me what you saw. Not what you imagined or conjectured. Just what you saw — actually saw with your own eyes."

"There isn't very much to tell," Vaughan answered. "I just happened to walk that way, for no reason whatsoever. Just by chance; I might have gone any other way as well. And finally I came out on the top of a little hill — no, not a hill exactly; more like a cliff — and from there I could see across to Satterlee's house. And while I stood there, I saw a man — Satterlee — come across the drive, and up the back way, and go in. Then, in a minute, I heard a noise up-stairs, and some one cry out; and then, a minute after that, Jack rushed out of the house, with Satterlee after him — and suddenly Satterlee took to running queer and wide and in a circle, with his head all held pitched to one side — ah, it was ghastly to see him — and then he came straight for the rock where I was standing, and all at once his legs seemed to go out from under him, and he sprawled right out on the gravel on his face, and lay there. I turned faint for a minute, I think, and the next thing I recall was looking down again, and there was Jack trying to lift Satterlee up, and when he scratched a match his hands were all over blood, and Satterlee's face — oh, I've dreamed it all fifty times since — he was dead then, I suppose. His head hung limp, I remember, and then — it was cowardly, of course, and all that, but the whole thing was so unexpected — so like a damnable kind of a nightmare, somehow — and Jack, you know — why, it was too much for me. I just turned, and made off, and never stopped till I'd got back safe into my room again. And that's all."

Henry Carleton sat silent, engrossed in thought. Almost he seemed to be oblivious of Vaughan's presence. "It couldn't be," he muttered, at last, as though incredulous still, "it couldn't be. Jack!" he paused, only to repeat the name again. Then he shook his head. "Never," he said with decision, "he would have told everything. You saw wrong, Arthur. You didn't see Jack."

Something in the older man's attitude of continued disbelief seemed to have the effect of nettling Vaughan. "How many times," he said, with a note of irritation in his tone, "must I repeat it? I tell you I *know*. Can't a man trust his own eyes? It *was* Jack. There's no room for doubt at all. Don't you suppose —" his voice rose with the strain of all that he had been through —" don't you suppose that I'd have jumped at any chance to clear him? Don't you suppose that if there'd been the faintest shadow of a doubt in his favor, I'd have stretched it to the breaking point to see him go free. No, there's no question. It was Jack. Why he did it, or how he did it, you can conjecture, if you wish, but one thing is plain. Murder Tom Satterlee he did."

His tone rang true. At last, in spite of himself, Carleton appeared unwillingly to be convinced. Again he pondered. "Then he perjured himself at the inquest?" he said quickly at last.

Vaughan nodded. "He perjured himself at the inquest," he assented.

"And you?" asked Carleton, again, "you perjured yourself too?"

"I perjured myself too," Vaughan answered. "There were plenty of other reasons, of course; reasons that you can imagine. It wasn't just a case of Jack alone. There was a lot else to think of besides. We talked it over as well as we could — Jack and I. We thought of you. We thought of Rose — and of me. We thought of the Carleton name. The disgrace of it all. We only had a quarter of an hour, at the most — and we lied, deliberately and consciously lied."

He looked up, instantly amazed at the look on Carleton's face, for Carleton was gazing at him as if he could scarcely believe his ears — as if this piece of news, for some reason, came as something more unexpected than all the rest. "You talked it over with Jack?" he said, "talked it over with Jack, and Jack thought of me — and the family name. Upon my word, Arthur, I believe one of us is mad."

Vaughan stared at him, uncomprehending. "I don't see why you say that," he returned. "What was there more natural? Or do you mean Jack wasn't sincere when he put that forward as a reason? I've thought of that, but I don't believe it now. Just think how we should feel if instead of sitting here and theorizing about it, we knew that the facts were really public property. Do you wonder that we stopped to consider everything? Do you wonder that we decided as we did? But we were wrong — all wrong — I knew it, really, all the time. To tell what I saw — that was the only honest thing to do. I lied, and now I'm going to try to make amends. I'm going to tell the truth, no matter what comes. It's the only way."

Impatiently Henry Carleton shook his head. "I don't agree with you, in the least," he said quickly. "I think you decided rightly. I should have done the same. And right or wrong, you've made your choice. Why alter it now? It would make the scandal of the day."

"I know it," Vaughan desperately assented, "I know it will. But anything's better than having things go on as they are now. I can't look people in the face. I've been miserable. I thought I knew what it was to be badly off before, but poverty, and bad luck, and failure — what are they, anyway? What do they amount to? Nothing. But a thing like this on your conscience. Why, a man's better dead. He can't live with it, day and night. He *can't;* that's all. I know. He's got to tell, or go crazy; it isn't to be endured."

Without making answer, Henry Carleton rose, and walked over to the window, standing precisely as he had stood before Vaughan's coming, gazing out into the blackness of the night. Then he turned. "Wait here," he said peremptorily. "I've got to get to the bottom of this, or you won't be the one to lose your senses. Wait here. I'll be back in half an hour, at the very latest."

Sudden conjecture dawned in Vaughan's eyes. "You're going —" he began, and then paused.

Henry Carleton completed the sentence for him. "I'm going to see Mrs. Satterlee," he answered. "I refuse to credit your story, Arthur, or what you say Jack admits, unless she corroborates your tale of what happened that night. It all depends on her."

He turned to leave the room, then paused a moment, and again turned to Vaughan. "Have you told Jack," he asked, "just what you propose to do?"

Vaughan shook his head. "I haven't seen Jack," he answered, "since the morning after it happened. To tell the truth, I've taken pains not to see him. I couldn't bear to. The whole thing got on my nerves. It seemed to change him so. And about this part of it, I haven't seen him, either. I couldn't. To go to a man, and read him his death-warrant. I couldn't. I thought I'd come to you."

Carleton nodded. "I think you've done wisely," he said, "if this can all be true, I must see Jack myself first. It becomes a family matter then. Well, I must go. Wait here for me, please. I won't be long."

For perhaps twenty minutes Vaughan sat alone in the library, his mind, after the long strain of all he had undergone, singularly torpid. Mechanically he found himself counting the squares on a rug near the table; three rows of six — three rows of five — eighteen, fifteen, thirty-three. Over and over again he did this until at last he pulled himself up short with a start. And then he heard footsteps ascending; and Henry Carleton hastily reëntered the room, his face stern and set. For an instant, as Vaughan rose, the two men stood confronting each other. "Well?" Vaughan asked, though reading the answer to his question in the other's eyes.

Carleton nodded. In the lamplight his face looked ten years older. He spoke but two words. "It's true," he said.

CHAPTER XVI

THE FAMILY NAME

"Reputation, reputation, reputation!"
Shakespeare.

IT was long past closing time at Henry Carleton's. Every one, from the oldest clerk to the smallest office boy, had long since gone home. For three hours, almost, the two men had had the office to themselves. A long, bitter battle of words it had been, all the stored-up brood of evil passions, hatred and envy, anger and fear, as with the bursting of some festering sore, had surged, foul and horrible, into the clear light of the open day.

Henry Carleton sat at his desk, but not in his usual attitude of calm composure, leaning back in his chair, the acknowledged lord and master of his little world, envied by all men who came to see him, to buy or sell, bargain and haggle, plot and plan. This Henry Carleton was a strangely different man.

Wearily enough he leaned forward in his chair, his head propped on one hand, while in the other the pencil which ordinarily never moved but to some purpose, to jot down some pregnant list of facts or figures, now moved over the blank surface of the paper in little aimless scrawls and circles; fit index, perhaps, to its owner's strange confusion of brain — a man for once troubled, wavering and irresolute, well-nigh, at times, despairing, yet still seeking feverishly the solution of the puzzle, making desperate hunt for the missing key.

Facing him sat Jack Carleton, astride of one of the office chairs, his hands grasping its back, his eyes never leaving the other's face. His whole expression — the twitching mouth, the deep-set gleam in his troubled eyes, the unconsciously wrinkled brow — all seemed to bear witness to some storm of passion that had passed over him, and even in the comparative calm which had followed, had still left its traces behind. One might have hazarded that the man who sat there staring into Henry Carleton's face was a man actuated by two feelings, one new, one old; one a fear, deep and deadly, the other a resentment so fierce and bitter, that unrestrained by time and place, it would have loosed him, like a bulldog, at the other's throat.

Without looking up, Henry Carleton again began the argument, his tone an odd mixture, half threatening, half conciliatory, as one who, knowing that it lies within his power to effect his ends by force, yet for some reason strives first to gain them by gentler means. "Jack," he said, "we have to find a way out somehow. And I want to play fair with you — I want even to be more than fair —"

Jack Carleton cut him short with a laugh so utterly devoid of mirth, so full of the bitterest malice, that a curse would have struck more pleasantly upon the ear. "Oh, yes," he mocked, "of course you do. You want to be fair." He paused a moment; then, with a naked, unrestrained, deliberate passion horrible to witness, he protruded his head with a gesture almost bestial, his tone lowered so that the words came sibilantly from between his teeth. "You damned sneak," he said, "why, in the name of God, can't you act like a man? Talk like a man? All these dirty, canting phrases of yours;

they've grown on you now so you can't drop 'em if you wanted to. You've stifled all the real man that was ever in you — and to start with that was precious little. You're a money making machine; money distributing, too, if that's any comfort to you; *you* credit to the Carleton name. You've sneaked and schemed your way so long that you do it from habit now; and a devil of a fine result you've got this time. You want to be fair. Fair! Oh, my God!" he laughed again.

Henry Carleton lifted a face flushed suddenly with angry crimson. "Stop it, Jack," he commanded, and then, through force of long discipline, with a sigh he slowly shook his head, and let his clenched hands relax. "What's the use?" he said, with infinite patience, "what's the use now, of all times? Hear me out, Jack. I know that you hate me. And I know why. I've been a successful man, and you've been a failure, but our chances were the same. You could have done as well as I. Only you chose to use your energies in a different way. That's all been your fault, not mine. And now this thing's come up. You've had a surprise to-day. You've found things very different from what you expected. But what is my attitude all the while? Am I trying to press my advantage as I could? That's the last thing I want to do. You think I hate you, Jack. Can't you see that I don't? If I did, would I be talking as I'm talking now? Would I talk with you at all, even? Would I above all sit here and take your insults — your abuse? Not for an instant. You sit there, alive and free — and yet a dead man, Jack. Think of it! Dead already. Dead as if you sat this instant in the electric chair. And what am I saying?— the man that you think hates you. What am I urging and advising all this time, when I could see you going in the prison door, never to come out again alive? I'm showing you how to get out of the whole thing scot-free; giving you every chance; and you won't listen to me."

Jack Carleton had heard him out in silence, indeed, but without further emotion, without any change of the hard, set look on his face. "Oh, you're damned generous," he sneered, as the other paused, "and you're doing it all out of love for me. It's awfully sudden, this affection, isn't it? It's been a long time coming." He laughed with a jarring offensiveness, as if, strangely enough, he was deliberately trying to incense, instead of to placate, the man of whose good will he stood so sorely in need.

Again Henry Carleton's face grew dark, as if at last his irritation had got the upper hand. "For Heaven's sake, Jack," he cried, "don't be a child, just for the pleasure of trying to annoy me. I say again, I'm being fair with you. I say again, more than fair. And if you want to exercise your irony on me by implying that I'm not actuated by any love for you, I'll say frankly that this is too complicated an affair for any one person's claims to be paramount in trying to settle it. I'm considering every one interested; I'm weighing all the chances for everybody concerned; you and I, and Rose, and Vaughan, and Mrs. Satterlee — we're all involved, and I say again, looking at everything from all possible points of view, it's for our interest, Jack — for yours and mine — to stand together, whatever happens. There's nothing I want more, whether you believe it or not, than to see you get out of the whole thing clear. And don't —" he raised his hand as Jack started to speak —" don't go running off on any abstract theory of what's right and what isn't. It's no use. It's waste of time. We've got to look at this matter as it is — not as perhaps it ought to be. It's intensely practical for us, Jack, and so let's look at it that way."

His words seemed effectual, as far as any further protest from Jack Carleton was concerned. For a moment he sat silent, and then, with an air of resignation, mingled with a certain indifference, "Very well," he said, "look at it in that way, if you choose, for all of me. How does that help? The whole thing's as mixed as before; you can't solve it satisfactorily, try as you may."

Henry Carleton, well pleased, drew a quiet breath of satisfaction. So much, indeed, seemed to him a signal gain. Little by little — that was Henry Carleton's way. "Good," he said shortly, and then, "but it can be solved, Jack, for all that. Not with perfect satisfaction to everybody, perhaps; but it can be solved."

He spoke with such an air of assurance that Jack Carleton glanced at him quickly, as if seeking some underlying significance in his words. Henry Carleton's face, however, was devoid of anything of enlightenment, and his eyes were looking idly across the room. "Yes," he repeated, "still satisfactorily, in the main, I think. It's a pure question of logic, Jack. Let's start with the assumption that if it can be avoided, you're not eager to die."

Jack Carleton's eyebrows were raised half grimly, half ruefully. Something of a kind of hysterical humor seemed to him to exist in the idea of asking a man with such seriousness whether or not he was eager to die. "Yes," he returned, "you can assume that. That's a good point to start with."

There was something in his tone, despite the solemnity of the discussion, that made Henry Carleton force a sickly smile, which faded almost before it had come. "And second," he said, "you'll keep quiet as long as any one else will."

Jack nodded again. "Certainly," he said, perhaps with more of bitterness in his tone.

Henry Carleton leaned forward, looking him now straight in the eye, and speaking with the most intense earnestness. "Then take the parties involved in their turn," he cried, "if you stick to that, no harm can come from you. No harm will come from me, in any event. And Rose, of course, doesn't know. Of the other two, Mrs. Satterlee —" he paused an instant, then continued, a little hastily, as it seemed. "Perhaps there's no further need of going into that. As we know, she is safe, and if not, there are certain precautions — no, we may dismiss that entirely, I think. And that —" the pause was longer this time, "that leaves the man who's been foolish enough to raise all this trouble to start with. That leaves your friend, and my prospective son-in-law, — one man to be reckoned with — Arthur Vaughan."

This time there was no mistaking the gathering menace in his tone. But Jack Carleton seemed not to choose to understand his words. "Well?" he asked.

Henry Carleton frowned. "Well," he snapped, "isn't it perfectly plain? Vaughan wants something, of course. He's got us where he wants us now. Of course I knew, for a man who, as a rule, is so pliable, that when he turned stubborn about this, it was a plain case of hold-up. So that's what we've got to do. Square him, in any way he wants. He's your friend. Sound him; see what he's after. Whatever it is, if I can give it to him, and I guess I can, of course I will. Go ahead and see him right away. We've got to fix him quickly, whatever else we do."

Jack Carleton shook his head in vigorous dissent. "You're miles wide of the mark. That isn't Vaughan at all. He's not that kind. Arthur's a visionary, almost. He'd never have kept quiet as long as he has if I hadn't practically gone on my knees to him. No, this is principle with him. You're altogether mistaken. You can't stop him that way in a thousand years."

Henry Carleton sighed. "I don't believe it," he said stubbornly. "I don't want to believe it, but you ought to know him better than I. And if it's so — I want to be fair with him — more than fair —" at the familiar phrase Jack Carleton smiled a grim little smile —" but we're in a bad box, Jack; a terribly bad box; and we've got to pull out of it somehow. Make him the squarest offer you can — anything in reason he wants — and if he doesn't see fit to accept —"

Jack Carleton sprang to his feet. "No, no," he cried, "that won't do. I won't see anything happen to Vaughan. I'll go to him; tell him he's mistaken; tell him he mustn't speak; tell him —"

Henry Carleton cut him short. "No use, Jack," he said curtly. "I've thought of all that. It wouldn't do any good. In the first place, Vaughan has this crazy idea about duty, and about Satterlee's blood crying out to him from the ground, and all that nonsense; you know how a nervous man can get worked up over a thing; and he's bound to speak anyway. And in the second place, he wouldn't believe you. You can hardly blame him, either. All the evidence together; the affair you had with that woman, your stopping at the cottage that evening,— no, no, it won't do. You might as well save your breath."

There was a pause. Jack at last nodded grudgingly. "Well, then," he cried. "I'll let it go the other way. Let him go to the district attorney, if he chooses. Let him tell his story, and let them arrest me, and get me into court. Let him tell it over again there, for everybody to hear, and you can tell your story, and Jeanne Satterlee hers. And then, by God, I'll tell mine, and if there's such a thing as justice —"

Again Henry Carleton broke in upon him. "Nonsense, Jack," he said, "law isn't justice. You know that as well as I do. You wouldn't have a chance. It's open and shut against you. And don't go up in the air about Vaughan; I didn't mean to be melodramatic. We won't need to go to extremes. We can think up some way of keeping his mouth shut. You can buy him off, I still maintain. And if you can't, we can still get at him somehow. It isn't hard. I'll be frank with you, Jack. I'll lay my cards on the table. It would mean death for you, but the scandal would hurt me, at the same time. And above all, the Carleton name, Jack. Think of your father. Think —"

Jack sprang to his feet. "Stop!" he cried. "It isn't for you to talk of my father, and the Carleton name. Those words don't belong in your mouth, Henry. And as for Vaughan, he's doing what he thinks is right. And anything you do to him, reacts on Rose — on your own daughter. And that's impossible. No, Henry, I tell you again, you can't work it out that way. Whatever else you please, but I won't see harm come to Arthur Vaughan."

Henry Carleton, unmoved, shrugged his shoulders. "As *you* please," he answered evenly. "You have your choice, Jack; there's only one other way."

Jack looked him full in the face. "For the last time," he said, "you tell me that this is true. You'll go ahead, and do as you say?"

The elder man inclined his head. "For the last time," he answered calmly, "yes. Vaughan or yourself? The choice is yours."

Jack Carleton stood suddenly erect, throwing back his head, almost with the gesture of a fighter on guard. "Then I tell you this," he cried, "you're crowding me too far. I've done the best I could; I've thought of others long enough; I'll think of myself now. There's a limit to what a man's got to stand. I've been an awful fool, I know. I've wasted most of my life, so far; lost my money; lost the chance to marry the girl I loved. But for the last three years, I've got no apologies to make. I've tried with every bit that's in me; I had my fight all but won. I made good out West there; made good with myself; with my prospects; with the girl I meant to marry — and then this damnable business had to come. And I tell you, Henry, I won't quit now. You've got the best of me before; perhaps you will again; but I'll take my chance. I'm willing to back Right against Wrong, and I give you fair warning now that I'm going to fight. You haven't beaten me yet."

He swung short around upon his heel, without waiting for a reply. The door crashed to behind him, and Henry Carleton was left alone in the room.

CHAPTER XVII

IN THE BALANCE

"I trust in God,— the right shall be the right
And other than the wrong, while he endures."
Browning.

HENRY CARLETON leaned back contentedly in his office chair. The afternoon was drawing to a close; another good day's work was done; the pathway of the future lay bright before him. Money? He had his fill of it. Except as the trophy, the stakes in the game, for which, coolly and half-disdainfully, it still suited him to play, he had come scarcely to value it at all. Fame? That, too, had come to him. His reputation, first made in the city, had spread later throughout the state, and now, thanks to that long and well-laid net of carefully adjusted wires, was to become national as well. Member-elect of the United States senate! It was enough. Fame — and power — and patronage — more glory to add to that of the long line of ancestors whose dignified faces looked down at him from the walls of the gallery at The Birches. He had done well; he knew it; and was content. Nor was he an old man yet. A glorious prospect lay before him still, filled with pleasures — of many kinds. Only this one matter to be adjusted now, and whichever way fate tipped the scales, he could not lose. How pleasant it was to look back over all his struggles with Jack! How pleasant to know, with the lifelong enmity between them, that in every encounter, he had decisively outwitted and got the better of his nephew! And now — either Jack must suffer, or if Vaughan's silence could not be bought, Jack's scruples must somehow be overcome. The latter, of course, everything considered, would be the better way. For Jack — much as he hated him — was a Carleton, and Jack's fate, in a way, was bound up with his own. And Vaughan was a nobody, a mere scribbler, of no use to the world. He must be silenced — somehow. Yet there was danger too. In spite of himself, the matter troubled him.

As he sat, thus musing, his clerk appeared at his elbow. "A young lady to see you, sir," he announced, "Miss Graham, from Eversley. I showed her into the private office."

Carleton nodded. "All right," he answered briefly. "Tell her I'll see her at once," and a moment or so later he was bowing deferentially over the girl's outstretched hand. "I'm delighted to see you back, Miss Graham," he said cordially, "if I thought a trip abroad would do me the good it's done you, I'd start to-morrow. You're looking splendidly. And what may I do for you? Is this a business call?"

The girl shook her head. "No, Mr. Carleton," she returned, "it's not; and I should apologize, I know, for coming to see you at your office. Yet I didn't want to go to The Birches either. I wanted to ask — I want to see you, Mr. Carleton — about Jack."

She paused, and as he waited, she did not at once continue, but sat with her eyes fixed on the ground, as if embarrassed, and uncertain how to proceed. So that presently he broke the silence.

"And what about Jack?" he asked lightly, though his watchful gaze was upon her face, "I rather thought that you and Jack could settle your own affairs. But if you can't —"

She glanced up quickly. "Oh, don't joke, Mr. Carleton, please," she said, "you wouldn't, if you knew how anxious I am. I can't seem to understand it at all. You know what good friends Jack and I always were; we were more than that; you know what I mean. And then — something happened. That was when Jack went West. And I was so glad when I heard how well he'd done — how well, I mean, in every way — and when he came back, everything would have been all right again. I had written him — and he'd written me. We had everything arranged. He was to meet the steamer in New York. And then — when we got in, he wasn't there. Only a message at the hotel that he'd been called away on business, and would see me soon. And that was a week ago; and I haven't seen him, or even heard from him, since then. I've asked all his friends. Franz Helmar doesn't know anything about him. Neither does Rose. And when I asked Arthur Vaughan, he acted as if he knew something, but didn't want to tell me what it was. So I've come to you, Mr. Carleton. If there's something about Jack that I don't know, and that I ought to know, I want you to tell me."

Henry Carleton sat listening to her, as she talked, his face expressionless, yet keenly attentive, all the while. And as she ended, he hesitated, before replying, as if struggling with some inward temptation which finally, in spite of himself, overcame him. At length he spoke. "My dear Miss Graham," he said, "I am so many years older than you, that I'm going to ask you to let me give you a piece of advice. I have felt uneasy — very uneasy — for a long time, concerning Jack's attentions to you. Not, of course, that one could blame him —" the girl ignored the somewhat mechanical smile which accompanied the words — "but the man who aspires to win your hand, Miss Graham, should be of a type very different from my nephew. I'm not talking at random; I know whereof I speak; and as a friend, I want to tell you that it would be better for you to forget all about

Jack — not to try to find out anything concerning him — but to dismiss him entirely from your mind. And I don't think —" he added significantly, "that you will find yourself troubled by him any more."

The girl's expression was one of bewilderment. "Troubled by him," she repeated. "Jack *trouble* me. You don't understand, Mr. Carleton. I haven't made myself clear. I'm as fond of Jack as he is of me. I've promised to be his wife. And all I'm asking now is what has happened to keep him away from me. There's some mystery about it, and I want to know what it is."

Henry Carleton gave a little apologetic cough. "Really, my dear Miss Graham," he said, "you make this very hard for me. I was trying to intimate, without putting things too plainly — I thought you would understand — you know that Jack's character is none of the strongest; you know his weaknesses as well as I do. You don't want me to go on, Miss Graham, I know. Why should I pain you? Let us leave things as they are."

At last the girl seemed to comprehend, yet she did not take his words without protest. "Jack isn't weak," she cried indignantly, "you've no right to say that, Mr. Carleton. If you knew all that he's conquered — all that he's overcome — you'd know that he's strong, not weak. And please don't hint or insinuate about him; this is too serious for that. If you've something to say against him, say it. Don't half say it, and then stop. It's neither fair to him, nor to me."

Henry Carleton raised his eyebrows. "As you will," he responded evenly, "I only sought to spare you, Miss Graham. But if you want me to tell you, I suppose you know as well as any one that before Jack went away, he'd made himself conspicuous by going around in public with the girl who later married my chauffeur, Satterlee. There was nothing improper, I believe, about it all; simply a bit of boyish folly and bravado; nothing worse. But on Jack's return — I don't know, of course, what his life in the West has been; I suppose that perhaps one might hazard a guess — he fell in with this woman again, and this time — I'm speaking plainly, Miss Graham, because you've asked me to — this time their relations have passed the bounds of decency. He visits her openly. And that, I suppose, is the reason that he keeps away from you."

A little red spot flamed in the girl's cheeks. "It's not true!" she cried, "I don't believe it — not a word. I know Jack too well. No man could have written me the letters he has — it's a lie; a lie!" Face and figure alike were tense and rigid with emotion.

Henry Carleton's eyes gleamed, yet when he spoke, his tone was calm. "My dear Miss Graham," he said, "pardon me for suggesting it, but isn't your conduct rather extraordinary. You come here, in my office hours, knowing that I am a busy man — a man of varied interests — you come here, on your private affairs, which surely have no special interest for me — and then, upon my giving you all the assistance in my power, you inform me that I lie. Really, Miss Graham —"

The girl rose quickly, yet her expression seemed to show little of contrition. "I beg your pardon, if I was rude," she said, "you are quite right to remind me that I am taking up your time. I will go at once."

She did not give him her hand in parting, nor did he stir from where he stood, as she walked toward the door of the office. Before she reached it, he spoke again. "If you care," he said smoothly, "to hear the rest —"

She turned upon him. "I do not," she said, "I care to hear nothing more. And you say, upon your honor, that what you've told me is true?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "You're very hard to convince," he said. "I don't blame you. It's not a pleasant thing to hear. But it is true. He's not away on business. He goes there constantly. In fact, if you care to see him, I dare say you would find him there now."

The words struck home. For an instant the girl stood gazing at him, as if she would have spoken; then quickly turned, and left the room.

A chance shaft sometimes cleaves to the very center of the mark. At the hour and minute when Marjory Graham was leaving Henry Carleton's office, Jack Carleton sat with Jeanne Satterlee in the parlor of the little cottage at Eversley. His face was pale and drawn, and he was talking tensely, earnestly, evidently striving, with all the power within him, to convince and persuade with his words. The woman sat with her eyes averted, as if she listened half against her will. Three years of life had wrought their change. She was beautiful — beyond all question — more beautiful than ever; and yet a nameless something had crept into her face — hardly to be detected, even — a certain look of restlessness — of discontent — a vague change for the worse.

"And so, Jeanne," Carleton concluded, "that's all I ask. I say nothing about that panic in the stock market — I say nothing about the property. You know, and I know, what he did, and how he did it; I got it all out of that sneak, Cummings; but all that's past and done with now. Even if I wanted to make the scandal, I'm not sure that he's answerable legally; he's a wonderfully clever man. And I say nothing about poor Vaughan, and his book.

You know, and I know, how he worked that with Cummings, but once more, that's done with now. And Vaughan's come into his own, at last. But about the other thing, that's different, Jeanne. You must speak. You can't say that you won't, where it's life and death. You must do it, Jeanne; I've a right to make my fight; you *must.*"

There was a pause. And then the woman spoke. "I can't, Jack," she parried, "I promised. I wouldn't dare —"

He interrupted her. "Promised!" he echoed. "What's a promise wrung out of one by force? Nothing. You can't mean you'd let that stop you, Jeanne."

She looked up at him, with appeal in her glance. "Jack," she said desperately, "I'll tell you the truth. I'm afraid. Afraid he'd kill me. You're a man; you're strong, and could fight. You don't know how a woman dreads anything like that. He said that night he'd kill me, if I told. And I promised — I promised, Jack."

Carleton gave an impatient sigh. "Nonsense, Jeanne," he said sharply, "he wouldn't dare.

He only threatened, to frighten you. You — of all people. And can't you see? He couldn't afford to, if he would. Where's his hold on me, then? Tell him, Jeanne, what you're going to do, and then go away, if you're frightened; go somewhere where you'll be safe. Go straight to Marjory Graham, why don't you, and stay with her."

"Yes," she flamed, "go to Marjory Graham! That's just like a man. You don't think of me, Jack, at all. Tell her everything! That's such an easy thing to say. You don't think of the shame — the disgrace —"

Carleton rose, and walking across the room, laid a hand upon her shoulder, looking down into her face, as he answered her. "Jeanne," he said, wearily, "we've been over this so many times that there's no use in saying anything more. Only this. I'm not asking you to do this for me, or for Marjory, or for Arthur, or for Rose, though if you do it, you'll be doing it for all four of us at once. That isn't the point. A man gets to thinking pretty hard when he's in a fix like mine, and his own life dwindles down to something that doesn't count for much, after all. But I tell you this, Jeanne, and you can call it preaching, and laugh at it, if you choose, but it's so: there's only one thing in the world worth doing, after all, and that's to try to keep as near to what's right and fair as we can. People can disagree about lots of things — you can criticize my life, and I can criticize yours — but some things are so plain that there's no chance to differ about what's right and what's wrong. And the trouble we're in now is one of them. You ought to tell Arthur Vaughan. You ought to tell Marjory. And then your part is done. You can leave the rest to fate. But to keep silence now, because of a promise that was forced from you — it isn't square — it's upsetting the belief that every one ought to have: that in the end the right's a better thing than the wrong. And, Jeanne, I tell you this once more. If you won't do what you ought to do; if you still keep silence; I tell you this: I won't see harm come to Arthur Vaughan. I won't see Rose's life spoiled. There's one thing I could do, and that's to put myself out of the way, and stop everything; but that would be cowardly, I suppose. No, I'll make my fight, but you know as well as I do, that it's a losing one. My life is in your hands, Jeanne, and I've a right to ask you to do what's fair. I've tried, for three years now, as hard as a man could try. I'll never be anything famous in the world — I know that — but I've a right to want to bring some credit to my father's name, even if it's only by living an honest life, to marry, and to pass the name down to some one that can do better with it than I've done. That's all, Jeanne. And there are only two days left. That's as long as Vaughan will wait. So you've got to make up your mind quick. Think it over, Jeanne, and for every one's sake, be fair."

She rose from her chair, shaking off his hand. "I'm afraid, Jack;" she said once more, "I'm afraid."

Carleton's hand fumbled in his pocket; then, finding what he sought, he handed it to the girl. The light flickered upon the polished barrel. "You could use it?" he asked. The girl nodded. "Then you've no reason to fear him," he said. "Tell him, Jeanne, when he comes to-morrow night, and then you go straight to Marjory's, and tell her too."

She looked up quickly, as if seeking to make one last plea. "You ask too much, Jack," she cried. "If I had my life over — but I haven't. I've lived out all that was ever good in me; there's only one kind of life left for me now. And he's been good to me — given me everything. And think of all I lose. All the life I'd see down there. All the money. All the good times. You're not a woman, Jack. You don't understand. Think of the fun —"

Once more he laid his hand upon her shoulder. "Is it worth it, Jeanne?" he said.

CHAPTER XVIII

REPARATION

"Whoever fights, whoever falls,
Justice conquers evermore."

Emerson.

THE butler had withdrawn to superintend the bringing in of the dinner's final course. Helmar, with his hand outstretched toward his wine glass, for a moment hesitated, and looking first at Rose and then at Vaughan, came to a puzzled, half-humorous pause. "I realize," he said, "that this is the proper time for a toast, yet my tongue is tied. Not through diffidence, either. I never have stage fright, and I know exactly what I'm going to say. In fact, I've been working all day on it, and if anything should happen now to prevent me from inflicting it on you, it would be the bitterest of disappointments — to me, I mean. But the question of proper precedence is what I can't make up my mind about. For the life of me, I don't know whether I ought to drink first to Rose, and reserve a separate glass for our rising author here, or whether my first duty is to drink to you both, in celebration of your engagement's being formally made public to-morrow. By the latter plan, you see, I'm forced to drink alone, which is always bad; by the former, I manage to be in good company each time. And on the whole, I believe that's the proper way. So here goes. Arthur, I propose the health of Miss Rose Carleton. In order not to embarass her, I intend to refrain from any fulsome praise, merely observing that the fact that she is herself, suffices for everything. Youth, beauty, virtue; Arthur, you're a fortunate man, and the only drawback to the whole affair is the horde of envious enemies you're going to make for yourself. But that you'll have to stand for; and the reward is certainly worth it."

He bowed with exaggerated deference as he concluded, and the girl, laughing, softly clapped her hands. "Oh, beautiful, beautiful, Franz," she cried, "I'm overcome. I suppose I ought to respond, but in the presence of two such distinguished beings, I'm actually dumb. But, believe me, Mr. Toastmaster, I deeply appreciate your effort. It's fully worth all the time you must have spent on it."

Vaughan, touching his glass to Helmar's, laughed also. "There, Franz," he cried, "isn't that a fitting reward? And as for your enemies, and their envy, let them come, all of them. I'm safe; nothing matters now," and the look in Rose Carleton's eyes, as their glances met, was more eloquent than any response could have been.

The toast drunk, Helmar turned to the girl. "And now, Rose," he said, "actually words fail. Here comes the really difficult part. How shall we try to describe such greatness? The literary man; the author fairly launched; the coming all-around novelist of the century, who has shown himself a romanticist by aspiring to the hand of Miss Carleton and a realist by winning it. There, how does that suit you? Will that do?"

The girl smiled. "Indeed it will," she answered. "But if it's permissible ever to amend a toast, even such a good one as that, I'm going to venture to do it. Something so nice happened to-day. Tell him, Arthur, do."

Vaughan shook his head. "Not I," he answered, "I wouldn't dare. I'm having a hard enough time as it is, trying to make all these remarkable things seem real. I still walk around pinching myself, and pulling out letters and telegrams and re-reading them, to make sure they're genuine, after all. But if I should start to talk, I'd know I was a liar before I said five words. I don't mind listening, though, a bit. Go ahead and tell him, Rose, if you want to, and I'll sit still and try to look the part of modest but intensely deserving merit. That's the best I can do."

Rose turned eagerly to Helmar. "Well, then," she cried, "he got word to-day. The book's gone into a third large edition. In three months! And his first book! Think of it. And he's had more fine letters and notices, besides. And two other magazines have written to see if he has any short stories he'd let them see. So he's going to be a great success, and I'm awfully proud of him, and when we drink our toast, I want it to be to the author, the book and the third edition."

Helmar nodded in vigorous assent. "By all means," he exclaimed, "if all amendments were as good as that one, no maker of an original motion could ever object. We'll drink to the third edition, of course, and I hope, before we're done, there'll be thirty of them. There," he added, as he put down his glass, "my pleasant duty's done, and I think I may claim well done. Unless, Arthur, you can think of anything I've omitted."

Vaughan shook his head. "No, no," he answered, "you've been a great success; said a lot of things about us both that aren't true, and successfully reduced us to just the proper stage of uncomfortable embarrassment."

Helmar laughed. "It's a pity, though," he said, "that we didn't have our full attendance. Think of all the other nice things I might have had a chance to say. Wasted opportunities. Marjory unable to come; Jack kept away on business; Mr. Carleton started for his big time in town. That *is* a banquet, though, with a vengeance, isn't it!

Think of it; United States Senator! But of course every one knew he'd make it. I never saw such a man. Success in everything. He's certainly a wonder. You must feel awfully proud of him, Rose."

She nodded gaily. "Of course I do," she answered. "We must drink his health, anyway. He deserves it. What shall we say? The man who has brought new honors to the Carleton name!"

As they drank the toast, the butler entered with the coffee and cigars, and the girl rose, smiling down at Vaughan. "Don't be too long, now," she said, "remember I'm all alone."

As the portiéres closed behind her, Helmar turned to Vaughan. "Well, Arthur," he said, "you're certainly a lucky man. Engaged to such a girl as Rose, and fairly on your literary feet into the bargain. It's fine about the book. I didn't realize it was doing so well."

Vaughan nodded. "It was queer," he said meditatively, "about the whole thing. I guess I ought to be ashamed of myself for claiming, once upon a time, that there was a pull in literature.

Because look how it worked with me. There I had Mr. Carleton using all his influence, and three times that book was turned down. And then, just because Jack kept after me to do it, when I took the manuscript back and began plugging ahead with it on my own account, just see what happened. It was accepted the very next crack."

Helmar puffed thoughtfully at his cigar. "It does look that way," he assented, then, after a little pause, he asked abruptly, "Arthur, how about Jack and Marjory? Was it just a coincidence they didn't come to-night, or was it something more than that? I don't believe they're hitting things off, somehow. And Jack himself — I never saw a fellow so changed. Ever since that time he was out at The Birches he has seemed awfully down on his luck. I was wondering —"

Vaughan rose quickly. "Oh, he's worried about his business, I think that's all." Then added abruptly, "Would you mind smoking in the other room, Franz? Rose doesn't object, and I hate to leave her alone."

Helmar rose also. "Of course not," he said, "why didn't you say so sooner? Let's go right in."

Half way down the hall, Henry Carleton's valet approached them, a letter in his outstretched hand. "For you, Mr. Vaughan," he said.

Vaughan, taking the letter, hastily opened it, and read its contents. A puzzled frown wrinkled his forehead. "H'm," he muttered, "that's queer," and as they entered the parlor, he spoke at once to his fiancée. "Rose," he said, "I'm sorry, but everything about to-night seems to be fated. First our guests disappoint us, and now I'm called away myself. But only for an hour. I'll be back just as soon as I can."

The girl's face clouded. "Oh, no, Arthur," she cried, "not to-night. You oughtn't to go to-night, no matter who it is. Tell them to wait —"

He broke in upon her. "I'm sorry, my dear," he said gravely, "but this is something that can't be delayed. I must go at once."

There was no misunderstanding his tone. "All right, then, Arthur," she said, "but be back as soon as you can," and nodding, he left the room.

The waiting motor made short work of the distance between The Birches and Colonel Graham's home; and a short half hour later Vaughan was ushered across the threshold of the big drawing-room. Marjory Graham came forward to meet him, and then, as she led the way across the room, he stared in surprise at the sight of the second figure that rose from the seat by the open fire. Yet Marjory Graham seemed to see nothing unusual in the situation. "I think you know Mrs. Satterlee, Arthur," she said, and Vaughan, his wonderment increasing every moment, bowed, and took his seat.

The lights were turned low; only the firelight flickered and gleamed about the room. Marjory Graham reached out and took the woman's hand in hers. "Tell him, Jeanne," she said.

There followed a pause, and then at last, slowly and with evident effort, Jeanne Satterlee began to speak. "Mr. Vaughan," she said, "the fewer words the better. You've made up your mind to tell the story of that night. If it's going to be told, it must be the true one. I've promised Jack to tell what I know to Miss Graham and to you. I've already told her."

She paused, while Vaughan sat waiting breathlessly, his eyes fixed upon her face. And then she spoke again. "There's no need to ask you," she went on, "whether you remember all that happened on that night. You remember how you were all together at The Birches; how Jack said he was going to bed early; how you and Miss Rose sat out on the piazza; how Mr. Carleton played billiards with Jim Cummings, and then how he came down and told you he was going for a walk about the grounds. You remember every bit of that, of course?"

Vaughan assented silently. "And then," she went on, "you went for a stroll yourself; you came to the rock opposite the cottage, and saw Tom when he came in. You heard the noise; you saw some one run out of the house, with Tom after him; and then you saw Tom fall, and a minute afterward you saw Jack bending over him, with Tom's head on his knee."

Again she stopped for his assent; again Vaughan nodded; and once more she continued, "You thought it was Jack who was in my room; you thought it was Jack who ran from the cottage. And no one could blame you, Mr. Vaughan, for what you thought. But I'm going to tell you the true story of that night — to my shame. Jack Carleton wasn't in the cottage; there was never anything between Jack and me — though I tried — never mind, I've told Miss Graham — but there was some one in my room that night, and that man was the father of the girl whom you are going to marry."

Vaughan's heart seemed to stop beating; there came a ringing in his ears; his voice, when he spoke, sounded faint and far-away. "*Henry* Carleton?" he gasped.

Jeanne Satterlee bowed her head. "I said the fewer words the better," she went on. "It wasn't the first time. Things had been — that way — for nearly two years."

Vaughan's face flushed with anger. "Henry Carleton!" he cried again, "it's impossible. How dare you say it?"

Jeanne Satterlee's tone did not alter, its very calmness carrying conviction with it. "It's true," she said, "every word. And more, Mr. Vaughan, that you will never know. It's all true. Jack knows —"

Vaughan started at the name. "But how did Jack —" he began. She broke in upon him. "Jack suspected," she answered. "He saw me at the cottage that afternoon. He talked with Tom. He put two and two together. And you know what he thinks of his uncle, anyway. So he came down to the cottage that evening, early. He was hidden outside. And after Henry Carleton got away — he struck Tom from behind to do it — then Jack came down into the drive to help Tom — and you had to see him. And that was all."

Vaughan sat as if stunned. "My God!" he muttered, under his breath, "my God!"

Once more Mrs. Satterlee broke the silence. "And then," she said, "you went to Henry Carleton, and told him what you thought you knew. And he sat there, and listened to you telling him that Jack did the murder. He came to the cottage that night. He was furious. He'd have killed you, I truly believe, if he'd dared. He threatened me, even. He told me I must stick to the story that Jack was in my rooms, and murdered Tom; and that he'd see that no harm came to Jack; that money could do anything; that he'd get Jack out of the country; and that it would be better for every one; and I was frightened — and promised. And then —"

Gradually, as she talked, the whole sequence of events had been shaping in Vaughan's brain. And now, all at once, and more to himself than to the others, he voiced his thoughts in words. "I see; I see;" he cried; "that was why I could never seem to believe it. Poor Jack! Poor Jack! Oh, what a fool I've been!"

Again he was silent, and she concluded. "And then Jack came to me — I did all this for him — don't think it was easy for me. And I told Henry to-night, before I came here. He was going in town, and came to the cottage first. And I told him — with a loaded pistol in my hand. He wouldn't believe me at first. He never knew that I — that I was fond of Jack — and when he realized I was in earnest, I thought he was going out of his mind. I never saw a man so changed. He said I'd ruined him — ruined his whole life — and then, all at once, he put his hand to his head, and stopped right in the middle of what he was saying, and turned, and went away. And I came here, to keep my promise. I told Jack to come here at eight; he ought to be here now."

Vaughan pulled out his watch. "Quarter past," he said, "I suppose he'll be here soon."

Marjory Graham turned to him. "Mr. Carleton lied to me, Arthur," she said, "tried to make me believe awful things of Jack. And I knew — I knew all the time that he lied. Think of it. Think how Jack —"

Vaughan nodded, yet even on the instant another thought flashed through his mind. "But, Rose!" he cried, "I never thought. Rose! Good God!"

"I know; I know;" cried the girl, "I've been thinking about her. You mustn't speak now, Arthur. Jack didn't, even before he knew. And you mustn't. It would kill Rose."

Vaughan drew a long beath. "Marjory —" he began, but the sentence was never finished. A quick step sounded in the hall outside, and Jack Carleton came hastily into the room. In an instant, as if unmindful of all else, Marjory Graham had risen, and crossed the room, her face transfigured —"Oh, Jack!" she cried, "Jack!"

For a moment he drew her to him; then, without speaking, his arm still around her, came forward to meet the others. Vaughan, too, had risen, and stood with outstretched hand. "Jack," he said, "I never knew — I never dreamed — can you forgive me?"

In answer Carleton took his friend's hand in his, yet without uttering a word. His face was haggard, his eyes wild. Jeanne Satterlee started to her feet. "What is it, Jack?" she cried, "something's wrong."

Carleton looked from one to the other, moistening his lips with his tongue before at last the words would come. "It's Henry," he said hoarsely, "he's dead. At the station. He fell in front of the train. He slipped — an accident —"

For an instant there fell silence — utter; horror-stricken. And then Vaughan's eyes sought Carleton's face. He spoke in a tone scarcely above a whisper. " An accident —" he said.

Carleton met his gaze squarely. The silence deepened; and then, " An accident," he said again, " he must have thought of Rose — and the Carleton name. And Rose must never know."

Assentingly Vaughan bowed his head; then stood, gazing straight before him, a dawning horror in his eyes. Jeanne Satterlee sank back in her chair, covering her face with her hands. Drawing a long breath, Carleton seemed again to come to himself. Very gently he drew Marjory closer to his side. Neither spoke, for no words were needed. Her glance told him all that he wished to know; he bent over her, and their lips met.

THE END

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